Sunday, June 28, 2026 No 178 ₹8

DH on Sunday

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DECCAN HERALD
The Power of Good

India in must-win clash to survive

Harmanpreet & Co take on Australia in last World Cup group game

P12

Court summons Priyank, Nalapad over remarks on RSS

P6

ಮುಖ್ಯ ಚುನಾವಣಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳ ಕಛೇರಿ, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka

BE A PART OF SIR 2026

The purpose of SIR (Special Intensive Revision) is to include all eligible citizen in the voter list. During this SIR, check and ensure your name is in the voter list. Become a part of the foundation of democracy.

Description	Date
Qualifying Date	1st October, 2026
House to House Visits by BLO's	30th June, 2026 to 29th July, 2026
Publication of Draft Electoral Roll	5th August, 2026
Period for filing Claims & Objections	5th August, 2026 to 4th September 2026
Notice Phase/Disposal of Claims & Objections	5th August, 2026 to 3rd October 2026
Publication of Final Electoral Roll	7th October, 2026

What will BLOs (Booth Level Officers) do?

- Will provide enumeration forms to all voters who were on the electrol roll as of 16th June 2026.
- Will visit your homes between 30th June 2026 to 29th July 2026.
- Will give you two copies of the enumeration form and will help you to fill the form.
- Will collect the enumeration form you filled out and give you a receipt for it.

Elector is requested to:

- Fill out both forms given by the BLO.
- Affix one recent color photo on the form. (This is not mandatory).
- Contact the BLO if you need help in filling the form or uploading it online.
- Hand over the filled forms to the BLO and collect the receipt

Publication of Draft Electoral Roll - 5th August, 2026 (Wednesday)

Eligibility for Elector

As per article 326 of The Constitution of India:

- Citizen of India.
- At least 18 years of age.
- Ordinarily Resident of the constituency.
- Not disqualified under any laws.

How to know if your name is in the Draft Voter List?

You can check

- From the voter list kept by the Booth Level Officer (BLO).
- From the ECINET mobile app.
- You can check the voter list at voters.eci.gov.in.
- You can check it from the websites of CEO Karnataka & the concerned District Election Officer.

What to do if your name is not in the Draft Voter List?

You need to fill Form 6 and submit it along with declaration form. You can submit it to the Booth Level Officer (BLO) or apply online at voters.eci.gov.in or via ECINET app.

List of Indicative (not exhaustive) Documents

1. Any Identity card/Pension Payment Order issued to regular employee/pensioner of any Central Govt./State Govt./PSU
2. Any Identity Card/Certificate/Document issued in India by Government/local authorities/Banks/Post Office/LIC/PSUs prior to 01.07.1987
3. Birth Certificate issued by the competent authority
4. Passport
5. Matriculation/Educational certificate issued by recognised Boards/universities
6. Permanent Residence certificate issued by competent State authority
7. Forest Right Certificate
8. OBC/SC/ST or any caste certificate issued by the Competent authority
9. National Register of Citizens (wherever it exists)
10. Family Register maintained by Govt. officials under any Statute/Administrative/Regulation
11. Any land/house allotment certificate by Government
12. For Aadhaar, Commission's directions issued vide letter No. 23/2025-ERS/Vol.II dated 09.09.2025 shall apply

Application Forms:	
Form 6	New voter registration
Form 6A	Overseas voter registration
Form 7	Deletion of name
Form 8	Shifting of Residence/Correction of Entries/ Replacement of EPIC/Marking of PWD

APPEAL PROVISION

An appeal under Section 24 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 on any decision of the ERO lies with the District Magistrate (District Election Officer)

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For more information please visit

https://www.ceo.karnataka.gov.in

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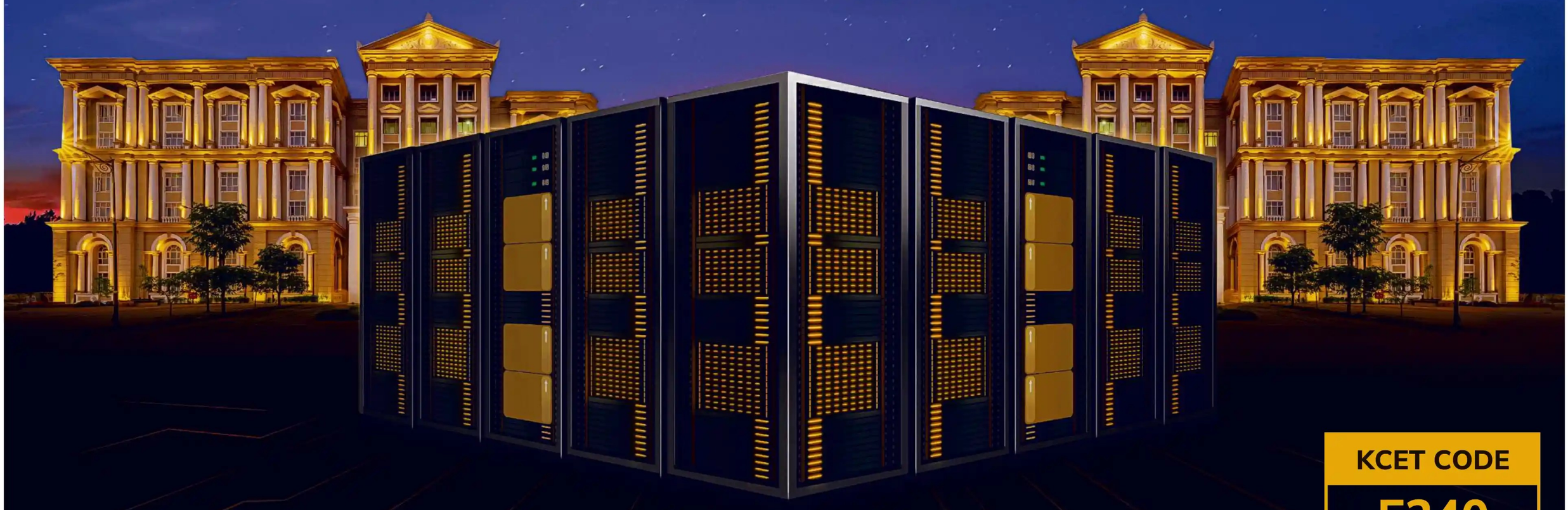

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COMEDK CODE **E182**

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Bengaluru Sunday, June 28, 2026 Pages 24 Vol 79 No 178 ₹8

DH on Sunday

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DECCAN HERALD
The Power of Good

Bhagyaraj, who taught a generation to tell stories, dies at 73

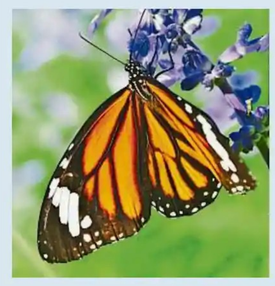
P8

Travel *Page18*

Abu Dhabi calling

Head to the UAE's capital not just for its glossy beachfronts but also for its history and culture

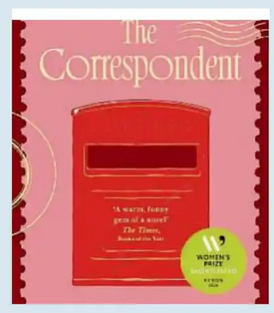
Art & Pursuits *Page20*



Wanderlust on wings

Milkweed butterflies are known for their spectacular biannual migrations, and Bengaluru gets a ringside view in June

Books *Page17*



Spurning the digital world

A moving novel about an ageing protagonist who sends out handwritten letters has won this year's Women's Prize for Fiction

Food & Drink *Page19*

Delicious makeovers

Yams and gourds, often dubbed boring, have begun to find a place on fine dining menus

Quickly

Ship struck; Iran, US trade attacks

A tanker was struck by a projectile in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday after the US and Iran each launched strikes in the worst escalation since they signed their interim peace deal. The warring sides each accused the other of violating the agreement they reached.
Details on Page 3

Ram temple: SIT finds large scale violations

The SIT, which was formed to investigate the alleged 'embezzlement' of crores of rupees in offerings at the Ram temple, in its interim report, has found large-scale procedural violations in the management of the donations. The SIT was expected to submit its final report in a fortnight.
Details on Page 3

Ancy breaks Anju's long jump record

Kerala long jumper Ancy Sojan smashed the 22-year-old national record which was in the name of legendary Anju Bobby George on the fourth day of National Inter-State Championships on Saturday. Ancy leaped a stunning 6.88m to better the previous national record of 6.83m which Anju created during the 2004 Athens Olympics.
Details on Page 13

Khalistan 'threat': Alert issued

Intelligence agencies have issued a security alert for Delhi and Uttarakhand following a possible Khalistani terror threat, with key religious sites, government establishments and police installations put under heightened surveillance. According to sources, the alert was triggered after an email surfaced warning of possible attacks in the coming days.
Details on Page 7

Abduction bid: Jilted lover dies in blast

A 23-year-old man was burned to death in a cab on a national highway in Tumakuru district on Saturday after he allegedly detonated a crude bomb while attempting to abduct his estranged lover, police said. The deceased has been identified as Nagendra, a native of Ankola, who police believe died by suicide in the incident on National Highway 48 near Jogihalli in Sira taluk.
Details on Page 3

Fight for a berth: The capacity crisis on India's rail routes

Even as Indian Railways ramps up infrastructure, overcrowded trains highlight the challenge of meeting the demand for affordable travel

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

Indian Railways carried 741 crore passengers in 2025–26, up from 351.9 crore in 2021–22. A file photo of a crowded railway station in Patna. PTI

Videos of passengers jostling to board trains from the washing pit lines at Darbhanga Junction in Bihar, hoping to secure seats on a sweltering June afternoon, went viral on social media.

In another incident reported a week later, several people vented frustration that they could not board the Seemanchal Express (from New Delhi to Jogbani in Bihar) at Pataliputra and other stations despite having confirmed AC 2-tier tickets.

The reason: passengers travelling on unreserved tickets occupied the entrances and refused to open the doors of the coaches, leaving many with confirmed reservations stranded at stations despite

INSIGHT

arriving on time.

Most of the passengers travelling on unreserved tickets who occupied the reserved AC and sleeper coaches were aspirants appearing for the Bihar Police Prohibition Constable examination, which was held on June 14 and 17.

"...there was complete chaos on the platform. We were travelling with our one-year-old baby, who was crying throughout the ordeal. What is the purpose of paying for a confirmed AC ticket if passengers cannot even enter their coach?" asked Rahul Kumar Pandey, an entrepreneur, on his X page, recounting how his family was unable to board the train despite holding confirmed tickets.

Such scenes have become increasingly common across India, with students, government job aspirants and migrant labourers forced to travel in overcrowded coaches without a seat, often squatting on the floor, in doorways, and even inside toilets.

As for students appearing for entrance and competitive exams, unless they know their exam centres well in advance, they are often unable to book tickets, as berths are sold out immediately when reservations open, especially on long-distance and busy routes.

Many travellers who are unable to secure confirmed reservations in general coaches and cannot afford sleeper or AC class tickets end up travelling in reserved coaches to reach their destinations. This often leads to overcrowding and inconvenience for passengers who have paid for reserved seats.

Data released by the Indian Railways shows that 3.39 crore passengers who booked tickets could not travel in the 2025–26 financial year due to unconfirmed or waitlisted tickets, highlighting the significant gap between demand and available capacity.

The number has risen sharply every financial year since 2021, when 1.65 crore travellers were unable to secure confirmed tickets, underlining the growing pressure on India's largest public transport system. This is despite the Railways operating special trains across the country during festival seasons to manage the rush.

Rail travel remains one of the cheapest and safest modes of transport in the country. Moreover, many passengers, particularly senior citizens, find it more comfortable than other modes of transport. While overcrowding in unreserved coaches has been a recurring problem for years, the practice of passengers occupying reserved coaches appears to have started around 2022, when regular travel resumed after the pandemic restrictions were lifted.

The number of people relying on trains for travel has risen sharply due to various factors, including the rising cost of living and increase in population. However, the Indian Railways appears to be struggling to meet this growing demand. Statistics support this trend. The number of passengers carried by the Indian Railways has more than doubled, rising from 351.9 crore in 2021–22 to 741 crore in 2025–26, reflecting steady annual growth in rail travel demand.

The modernisation of coaches from Integral Coach Factory (ICF) rakes to newer Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches also added to the problem.
▸ Rail strain, Page 4

UAPA and the human cost of delayed justice

Prolonged incarceration without trial raises questions about due process, liberty and the limits of national security law

ASHISH TRIPATHI

Activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, accused in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, were denied bail by the Supreme Court in January 2026. PTI/ REUTERS

Conflicting Supreme Court rulings on bail under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) have, in recent months, drawn attention to a deeper crisis within India's criminal justice system.

In January 2026, one Supreme Court bench denied bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case, citing the gravity of the allegations despite spending years in custody. Just four months later, another bench granted bail in a Jammu and Kashmir UAPA case, emphatically reiterating that "bail is the rule, jail is the exception" even under stringent anti-terror laws.

These divergent rulings prompted the Delhi Police to seek a reference to a larger bench. On May 22, the Supreme Court referred to a larger bench the question of whether prolonged incarceration can override the stringent bail restrictions under Section 43D(5) of the UAPA, seeking authoritative clarity on the issue. In the same order, the court also granted interim bail to two other accused in the Delhi riots conspiracy case.

At the heart of this judicial churn lies a deeper systemic malaise: chronic delays in investigations, chargesheet filing, the commencement of trials and their eventual completion. These delays often transform pre-trial detention into de facto punishment for undertrials.

The **SUNDAY STORY**

Advocate M S Khan, who has represented the defence in more than 100 UAPA cases, said the UAPA and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act, read together with the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS, formerly the CrPC), mandate expeditious trials. In practice, however, such cases are routinely delayed by voluminous case records, a lack of special courts and shortage of public prosecutors.

According to him, it takes a minimum of five years to frame charges.

Enacted in 1967 and significantly amended in 2008 and 2019, the UAPA empowers authorities with stringent provisions to combat terrorism and unlawful activities. Section 43D(5) creates a reverse burden: courts cannot grant bail if the prosecution's case appears prima facie true based on the chargesheet and case diary.

The law allows up to 180 days to file a chargesheet (extendable), while trials often involve voluminous evidence, protected witnesses and national security concerns. Although special NIA courts or designated sessions courts handle these cases, infrastructure and judicial capacity often lag behind demand.

Landmark rulings have often sought to balance national security with personal liberty. In *Union of India vs K A Najeeb* (2021), a three-judge bench held that stringent bail conditions under the UAPA do not take away constitutional courts' power to grant bail where prolonged incarceration violates the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. The court observed that the "rigours" of Section 43D(5) could "melt down" in cases of inordinate delay.

Yet, the application of this principle remains inconsistent. The 2019 Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali judgment directed courts to accept the prosecution's version at face value at the bail stage, limiting deep scrutiny of evidence.
▸ UAPA, Page 4

DH SPECIAL

A silent monsoon for the Western Ghats' frogs

PAVAN KUMAR H
HUBBALLI, DHNS

An Indian bullfrog

The rainfall deficit this year is having a significant impact on the life cycle of frogs. Researchers and citizen scientists have observed limited or no reproductive activity among common species such as the Indian bullfrog, common Indian toad and common skittering frog. They also fear that prolonged dry season could adversely affect populations of species endemic to the Western Ghats, including the Malabar tree toad, night frogs and bush frogs.

Frogs are considered bioindicators because they are among the first species to respond to environmental disturbances. As both predators and prey, they play a vital role in the food chain.

"During our field visits over the last fortnight, we found that many of the regular frog breeding grounds in the Western Ghats have fallen silent. Perennial streams play a vital role in the life cycle of several frog species as they lay their eggs in and around flowing water. However, with scanty rainfall in these biodiversity hotspots, water levels have dropped worryingly low. This could result in reduced breeding among endemic frogs," says Bengaluru-based frog researcher Gururaja K V.

He says that the last four years have been particularly difficult for frogs, with the Western Ghats witnessing increasingly erratic monsoons. "Common frogs, which have more widespread populations, may recover within a year or two after a drought. But populations of species endemic to the Western Ghats could be adversely affected by disruptions in rain patterns," he adds.

First breeders

Indian bullfrogs, one of the largest frog species in India, are usually among the first to display mating activity at the onset of the monsoon. However, citizen scientists say they have observed little or no activity at multiple locations this year. "These frogs need at least one to two inches of standing water to lay their eggs. However, due to sporadic and scanty rainfall, agricultural fields are not retaining enough water for these species to begin the breeding process," says Omkar Pai, a citizen scientist from Kumta. He says the number of bullfrogs sighted at breeding sites is less than 10% of what was observed in previous years.

"While we have recorded a few common frogs laying eggs, there is very little chance of their survival as the water bodies are drying up," he adds.

Gopalkrishna Hegde of Yellapur, a citizen scientist who has been monitoring the life cycles of Malabar tree toad, night frogs and bush frogs, says that the intensity of mating calls has reduced drastically over the last 20 days.

As predators, frogs feed on a large number of insects, while as prey, they form a significant part of snakes' diet. Malabar pit vipers, green vine snakes and other snakes largely depend on amphibians.

"Pit vipers give birth in April or May. The young feed primarily on small frogs. Without rain, frogs will not breed and there will not be enough food for the snakes," says herpetologist Gerry Martin.

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Iranian drones strike Bahrain after US raids

Vance warns Tehran that 'violence will be met with violence'

DUBAI, AP

Iran launched a drone assault targeting Bahrain while a ship in the Strait of Hormuz separately came under attack Saturday, in Tehran's likely response to overnight air strikes by the United States.

The attacks in the Persian Gulf show the danger of the Iran war again spinning out of control, even after Iran and the US reached an interim deal to try and agree on a final accord to end the conflict.

The US had launched air strikes overnight in response to an Iranian drone attack on a container ship trying to leave the strait on Thursday, continuing a string of attacks that have shaken the war's uneasy ceasefire.

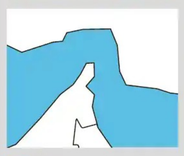
Meanwhile, a multinational maritime body overseen by the US Navy said Saturday that it would expand a route near Oman in the strait to allow for both inbound and outbound traffic. That likely sets up a new flashpoint with Tehran, which sees the strait as a key source of leverage in ongoing talks with the US.

Bahrain has been one of the strongest critics of Iran and is home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet. It just hosted US Secretary of State Marco Rubio for a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council's foreign ministers, which ended with a call for an end to Iran's attacks and for the strait to be completely open.

Chronology of latest flareup

1. US accuses Tehran of attacking a cargo ship on Friday
2. US forces strike Iranian missile, drone storage sites; coastal radar positions overnight
3. Bahrain says a "number of Iranian drones" targeted the country on Saturday
4. A tanker comes under attack on Saturday in Hormuz; no one immediately claims the strike

State of strait



1. International Maritime Organisation halts a new effort to evacuate ships
2. IMO says it won't resume ops until there are guarantees that ships won't be attacked
3. 115 ships move out in recent days
4. Iran has warned vessels not to enter/ leave Strait of Hormuz without permission
5. Some ships are using a route not authorised by Tehran

Lebanon deal void: Hezbollah

Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem condemned the US-Israel-Lebanon framework agreement on Saturday, accusing the government of surrendering Lebanese sovereignty and declaring the agreement null and void. "The framework agreement is humiliating and a surrender of sovereignty," he said.
Details on Page 9

A statement from Bahrain's Foreign Ministry said a "number of Iranian drones" targeted the country. It called the attack "a flagrant threat to the security of citizens and residents". There were no immediate reports of damage.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard earlier on Saturday issued a statement carried by the state-run IRNA news agency saying it had targeted several locations "of the US terrorist army in the region". It did not name what areas were targeted.

The US military's Central Command said the military struck Iranian missile and drone locations and coastal radar sites in the overnight strikes.

US Vice President JD Vance, who has led the negotiations with Iran, said on social media Friday night that Iran should "pick up the phone" if there are disagreements, "but violence will be met with violence".

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said that a tanker was attacked Saturday in the strait, with the crew safe and no environmental damage reported.

No one immediately claimed the strike, but suspicion fell on Tehran.

Abduction bid: Jilted lover dies in crude bomb blast

23-year-old had forcibly taken former classmate in cab

BENGALURU/TUMAKURU, DHNS

A 23-year-old man was burned to death in a cab on a national highway in Tumakuru district on Saturday after he allegedly detonated a crude bomb while attempting to abduct his estranged lover, police said.

The deceased has been identified as Nagendra, a native of Ankola, who police believe died by suicide in the incident on National Highway 48 near Jogihalli in Sira taluk.

Police said Nagendra was reportedly in a relationship with Ramya, his classmate from school days in Ankola. While he dropped out after class 10, she pursued a course in medical lab technology and landed a job in Bengaluru. Their relationship soured after Ramya refused to marry him, investigators said.

Nagendra, who worked as a delivery executive, had booked an Uber cab to Ankola around 11 am. Police alleged that he first went to Ramya's home in Bhovi Colony in the Siddapura police station limits, Bengaluru, and forced her into the cab.

Ramya's female roommate, who witnessed the incident, took a photo of the cab and dashed off to the Siddapura police station around 1.30 pm. Based on her complaint, police registered a kidnapping case and launched an investigation, a senior officer said.

Since the cab had left Bengaluru, Siddapura police contacted the driver, Praveen, and instructed him to stop the vehicle immediately. Realising that the police had been alerted, Nagendra allegedly argued with Ramya and attacked her with a knife. Alarmed, the driver pulled over near Jogihalli.

The charred remains of the cab on National Highway 48 near Jogihalli, Sira taluk, Tumakuru district, on Saturday.

Despite suffering knife injuries, Ramya managed to get out of the car and run. The driver then snatched the knife from Nagendra and threw it away. According to police, Nagendra then pulled a crude bomb from his bag and tried to ignite it with a lighter, but the driver managed to seize and throw it away. Despite the driver repeatedly asking him to get out of the vehicle, he refused.

The driver told the police that Ramya shouted, "Bomb tandiddaane, doora odi hogi, Anna" (He has got bombs, Anna, run away).

Fearing for his life, the driver ran away. Nagendra then allegedly took out another crude bomb, lit it with a lighter and detonated it inside the vehicle, killing himself.

Ramya, who sustained injuries in the knife attack, was admitted to the District Hospital in Tumakuru and is out of danger, police said.

Tumakuru SP Ashok K V told *DH* that the cab was completely charred when police and fire force personnel reached the scene. Forensic experts have taken samples from the cab to investigate the source of the explosion.

Police have also taken statements from Ramya and the driver. A case has been registered at Kallambella police station.

Ram temple donations: SIT finds large-scale violations

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

The Special Investigation Team (SIT), which was formed to investigate the alleged 'embezzlement' of crores of rupees in offerings at the Ram temple, in its interim report, has found large-scale procedural violations in the management of the donations at the temple.

The SIT submitted its interim report on June 23 and was expected to submit its final report in a fortnight.

Though the contents of the report were not made public, according to sources here, the report said that proper safeguards were not taken in handling of cash as well as jewellery offered by the devotees at the temple.

The report has opined that procedural lapses had led to the alleged 'embezzlement' of the offerings.

It has pointed out several lapses, including lack of deployment of security personnel during the counting of cash, checking of the employees engaged in the counting while entering and exiting the room and preserving the CCTV footage of the counting room for 180 days.

The report said that one of the key accused in the matter, Ramashankar Yadav alias Tinnu Yadav, who was arrested by the police along with seven others on Thursday, had the keys to many of the donation boxes which was a violation of the rules.

▸ Ram temple, Page 6

Rai has quit, says temple Trust

The Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on Saturday said its general secretary Champat Rai has resigned. Swami Govind Dev Giri, the treasurer, said that another member, Anil Mishra, has also resigned.
Details on Page 8

Trust to meet on July 7: VHP

VHP chief Alok Kumar said on Saturday that the Ram Temple Trust will meet in Ayodhya on July 7 to decide on the next course of action following the resignation of the two senior Trust functionaries over the donations row.

Functional disability key in accident compensation: SC

ASHISH TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI, DHNS

In an important judgment that could benefit road accident victims, the Supreme Court has held that compensation for permanent disability must be assessed based on the actual loss of earning capacity linked to the claimant's specific occupation, rather than solely relying on the percentage of medical disability.

A bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and N V Anjaria enhanced the compensation awarded to Shankar Dutt, a carpenter who lost his right leg below the knee in a 2004 road accident, to Rs 35,95,923 with 6% annual interest from the date of filing the claim petition. Dutt's motorcycle was hit by a jeep driven rashly and negligently.

Following the accident, he underwent amputation, which severely curtailed his ability to continue working as a skilled carpenter.

The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal had initially awarded him Rs 4,77,823. The Uttarakhand High Court raised it to Rs 11,51,423. Dissatisfied, Dutt approached the Supreme Court seeking further enhancement, contending that the amputation had rendered him completely unable to pursue his profession.

Emphasising that a carpenter is a skilled artisan whose livelihood depends on manual dexterity and expertise in working with wood, the apex court observed that the functional impact of the injury on his occupation was total.

▸ Compensation, Page 6

CM announces 'Wall of Gratitude' for land losers

BENGALURU, DHNS: Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday announced that the Karnataka government will create a 'Wall of Gratitude' to permanently honour landowners who voluntarily part with their land for public welfare projects, saying their sacrifices must be remembered for generations.

Addressing the 517th Kempegowda Jayanthi celebrations at the Bangalore Development Authority's (BDA) Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout, he said: "The government has decided to include the names of landowners who give up land without any objections for public welfare projects such as industrial areas, schools, lakes and road construction on a Wall of Gratitude. Through this, the sacrifice of these landowners will be commemorated."

▸ DKS, Page 6

Tension in Bidadi as rival farmers face off during HDK's visit

BENGALURU, DHNS

High drama unfolded at Byramangala near Bidadi on Saturday as Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy arrived for a public discussion on the contentious Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township project amid protests by rival groups of farmers, leading to deployment of a large number of police personnel.

> On one hand, the government speaks about planting lakhs of saplings in Bengaluru. On the other hand, it is preparing to cut down fully grown trees here in the name of development
>
> **H D KUMARASWAMY**

More than 500 police personnel were stationed around the venue after hundreds of farmers supporting and opposing the project converged on the village, raising fears of clashes. Barricades were erected along the minister's route while security personnel formed cordons to prevent protesters from blocking his convoy.

Tension escalated when a group of farmers carrying red flags attempted to stop vehicles heading towards the venue, demanding that Kumaraswamy first answer their questions on the proposed acquisition. At one point, supporters of the project mistook police vehicles for the minister's convoy and tried to intercept them before officers dispersed the crowd.

The two groups repeatedly traded accusations, leading to heated verbal exchanges that were contained by the police.

The organisers of the public discussion reserved an empty chair on the dais for Chief Minister D K Shivakumar after Kumaraswamy had publicly challenged him to attend the meeting and debate the township proposal before the affected farmers. Shivakumar did not turn up.

▸ Bidadi, Page 6

Producer's son, on trek, dies of cardiac arrest

HOSANAGAR, DHNS: Kannada film producer B M Harish's son Ullas (28) died of cardiac arrest near Kodachadri hill in the taluk on Saturday.

Ullas had gone for a trek to Kodachadri hills with his friend Suresh at 6.30 am. While returning after visiting the Sarvajna Peetha atop the hill, he suffered a massive heart attack in front of the temple and collapsed.
Details on Page 6

'Negligence' led to cross-voting'

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Karnataka BJP's fact-finding committee probing cross-voting by party lawmakers in the Legislative Council polls gave its report, highlighting how 'negligence' led to 12 NDA votes ending up helping Congress. MLC C T Ravi and former minister N Mahesh -- committee members -- gave the report to BJP state president B Y Vijayendra.
Details on Page 5B

HIGH DRAMA

Man hurls slipper at 'combative' Cong MLA Pradeep

CHIKKABALLAPUR, DHNS

There was drama at the Kempegowda Jayanti programme at Kannada Bhavan in Chikkaballapur on Saturday after a man in the audience hurled a slipper at Congress MLA Pradeep Eshwar.

A section of audience, mostly JD(S) workers and members of Vokkaliga community, who were angry at the MLA's recent remarks against Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy, demanded Eshwar's apology. The police wielded canes to disperse the crowd after the man hurled the slipper.

Amid sloganeering, Eshwar kept his speech short. "My heart-felt wishes on the Jayanti of Kempegowda, the samanta (feudal lord) of Vijayanagara king Sri Krishnadevaraya," he said and left the venue.

JD(S) workers and Vokkaliga community members sloganeering against MLA Pradeep Eshwar. DH PHOTO

The MLA, who was escorted by the police to his car, twirled his moustache and slapped his shoulder as if to challenge the agitators. He then shouted slogans in favour of Ambedkar, Valmiki and SC/STs. Irked by his gesture, a demonstrator hurled a slipper towards him. The police took the man into their custody.

In recent remarks, the Congress MLA had said: "Kumaraswamy wore watches worth crores. He has more than 60 expensive wrist watches. Does he have the guts to answer this? Has Anitha Kumaraswamy purchased 32 acres of land at Bidadi by selling Ramraj Panches?"

JD(S) workers and members of Vokkaliga community tried to disrupt the programme and tried to barge onto stage shouting 'go back' slogans against the Chikkaballapur MLA.

Repeated efforts to pacify the crowd by Adichunchanagiri Shaka Mutt seer Mangalanatha Swami and deputy commissioner G Prabhu failed to yield results.

Comfort, dignity at stake

Rail strain, from Page 1

While LHB coaches are about two metres longer than the older ICF coaches and offer a slightly higher passenger-carrying capacity per coach across all classes, LHB rakes are generally limited to 21 or 22 coaches because of platform length constraints. Older ICF trains, by contrast, could accommodate up to 24 coaches.

Though the focus has been on upgrading infrastructure, including laying new lines and adding more trains on some routes, overcrowding continues due to high demand.

Policy shift

According to railway department insiders, one of the biggest contributors to the current trend is a policy shift introduced in 2018 that prioritised the mass production of AC coaches while reducing the focus on manufacturing non-AC coaches. As the supply of new sleeper coaches failed to keep pace with rising demand, common commuters were left struggling for space.

Sudhanshu Mani, former General Manager of the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai, said he supported the vision behind phasing out non-AC coaches in favour of all-AC trains, as India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047. He said non-AC coaches, which have a 36-year operational life cycle, do not conform to that vision.

"But the planning was poor, as no proper alternative arrangements were made for passengers who cannot afford AC travel," Sudhanshu told *DH*. "As a result, the number of sleeper coaches came down, leading to overcrowding, not just in unreserved coaches, but also with unreserved passengers entering the reserved coaches."

Closer to the 2024 elections, as overcrowding became a major political issue highlighted on social media, the NDA government reversed its decision and began producing more non-AC coaches.

Accordingly, the focus has now shifted to producing more non-AC general and sleeper coaches, besides introducing Amrit Bharat rakes with a better balance of general and sleeper coaches.

Statistics show that in 2025-2026, as many as 7,000 coaches — 5,000 non-AC and 2,000 AC coaches — have been inducted into the fleet. Non-AC coaches still account for roughly 70% of the fleet, providing 54 lakh of the total 69 lakh passenger seats, while AC accommodations account for the remaining 15 lakh.

Shubhranshu, a retired railway official, told *DH* that the Railways should rely on both passenger feedback and its vast ticket-booking database before making decisions that affect travellers, pointing to the decision to make more AC coaches and then reversing it.

"Railways possess years of detailed data on passenger preferences and travel patterns. By leveraging artificial intelligence and data analytics, it can accurately identify routes and seasons where demand is higher for AC, sleeper or general-class travel. Coach composition should be planned accordingly," he added.

Rajasridhar, President of the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (SRMU), told *DH* that an analysis of the two Annual Reports of the Indian Railways for the years 2013-14 and 2023-24 suggests that while non-AC capacity increased during this period, AC capacity expanded much faster.

Rajasridhar said that while capacity expansion has occurred, the fastest growth has been in infrastructure modernisation, freight efficiency and AC accommodation.

More than just a seat

Sudhanshu emphasised that the central issue here is not merely comfort but the dignity of the passengers, pointing out that people cannot be expected to travel long distances in overcrowded and uncomfortable conditions.

Railway planning, he stresses, must prioritise ensuring that every long-distance passenger is guaranteed at least a seat, if not a sleeping berth. Furthermore, decisions regarding coach composition and the introduction of new services must be guided by long-term institutional foresight rather than knee-jerk responses to political pressure or immediate media backlash.

Acknowledging the problem of passengers with unreserved tickets entering reserved coaches, a senior railway official said that, since May 2025, waitlisted passengers have been barred from boarding reserved coaches.

However, such a rule is difficult to implement, say Train Ticket Examiners (TTEs). They find it extremely challenging to enter overcrowded coaches, as passengers sitting on the floor often block their access.

"We are stuck between those travelling without valid tickets in AC and sleeper coaches and those with reserved tickets. When we can't enter the coach, how can we even take action?" a TTE asked.

Passengers with reserved tickets often complain on social media and to the Railways, frequently holding the TTEs and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) responsible.

Railway activists argue that the government's priorities are fundamentally flawed. By focusing disproportionately on premium services such as semi-high-speed Vande Bharat trains to boost revenue and cater to affluent travellers, they argue, it has neglected the needs of ordinary passengers, leaving them to endure difficult daily journeys.

They also allege that the number of sleeper coaches has been reduced on several routes across the country, with AC coaches replacing them, apparently in response to demand. When the availability of sleeper coaches falls short, passengers are left with limited options, they say.

Officials say there is greater demand for three-tier AC coaches these days. "Because of limitations in train composition, we can only accommodate additional AC coaches by replacing sleeper coaches," an official told *DH*.

Kalaburagi-based activist Sunil Kulkarni said they have been demanding that the Railways introduce more trains, particularly on routes to Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad.

"Instead of adding more trains, the Railways is widening the demand-supply gap by converting sleeper coaches into AC coaches. Passengers who cannot afford AC tickets are left with limited choices — travelling in general compartments, paying more for AC tickets or adding to the overcrowding in sleeper coaches," he said.

The trend is evident across the country. On a Mumbai-bound train from Tamil Nadu, the number of sleeper berths has fallen to 400 from 576, while popular trains such as the Pandian Express (Chennai–Madurai) have lost around 150 sleeper berths. At the same time, the number of AC coaches has increased.

The same is the case with trains connecting Hyderabad to New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, where the number of sleeper coaches has been significantly reduced.

V Ramarao of the Chennai-based Traffic and Transportation Forum (TTF) said overcrowding on trains in southern India was relatively lower than in northern India, but trains heading north are generally packed with passengers.

"Over 80% of the country's population depends on public transport. The Railways should ensure that it caters more to the needs of ordinary passengers," he said.

Almost every northbound train from southern states, which have witnessed a significant influx of migrant workers, is crowded with passengers, many of whom struggle to find seats.

Rajasridhar said demand for affordable travel, especially on migrant-worker corridors, has grown rapidly, leaving overcrowding, long waiting lists, and pressure on sleeper and general-class capacity as persistent challenges for the system.

Liyons J, secretary of Friends on Rail, a rail users' forum in Kerala, told *DH* that they have repeatedly urged the Railways to provide at least two general compartments each at the front and rear ends of trains, besides an exclusive coach for women on overnight trains.

Benoy Peter, Executive Director of the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, an NGO working for the welfare of migrant workers in Kochi, said migrants are sometimes forced to opt for AC compartments or even flights to avoid losing working days.

"Since most trains to places such as Assam and West Bengal are packed, migrants are also taking multiple short-distance trains, which require more days to travel. Trains play a key role in the movement of migrants across the country. Hence, it is important to have a strong rail network that offers travel at a reasonable cost," he added.

Restoration of trains

Another complaint against the Indian Railways is that several passenger and express trains suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic have not yet resumed operations.

"The Kalaburagi–Hyderabad Intercity Express and the Solapur–Kalaburagi–Yadgir–Raichur passenger train should be restored. These trains were lifelines for migrant workers and daily commuters. Their discontinuation has resulted in other trains operating on the route becoming overcrowded," Sunil said.

Ramarao said, "The government has to take care of the people," while criticising the NDA government for doing away with the practice of presenting a separate Railway Budget, which he said had laid out better plans for the department.

However, Sudhanshu, who was the brain behind the Vande Bharat trains, said premium trains should be operated not only to increase revenue but also to cater to passengers who can afford them.

"There is enough proof that there was a strong, genuine demand for high-end travel when deployed on correct routes," Sudhanshu said.

He suggested that the national transporter consider privatising premium train operations, allowing detailed market studies to determine routes rather than political considerations.

"When a high-end train runs at a fraction of its capacity, its very purpose is defeated," he said.

Shubhranshu said that while catering to AC-class passengers is important, the Railways has an equally significant responsibility to serve non-AC passengers, including labourers, migrant workers and low-income travellers.

Both say that more lines should be added across the country.

While acknowledging the constraints in the railway network, a senior Indian Railways official told *DH* that annual new track commissioning has more than doubled since 2014, averaging 3,118 km per year after 2014, compared with 1,499 km earlier.

Doubling, tripling and quadrupling projects are underway, but their execution is hampered by land acquisition, funding and coordination issues, officials said.

"The capacity released by Dedicated Freight Corridors in North India should be used to run more passenger trains," Sudhanshu said. Looking ahead, he emphasised that Indian Railways needs a fundamental shift in mindset, urging the leadership to plan for 2050, as rolling stock built today remains in service for decades.

(With inputs from Ajith Athrady in New Delhi, Arjun Raghunath in Thiruvananthapuram, Pavan Kumar H in Hubbali and S N V Sudhir in Hyderabad)

The capacity crunch in trains

- Overcrowding remains a persistent problem in several long-distance trains in India, particularly during festivals, vacations and other peak travel periods
- Recurring incidents of overcrowded coaches, widely captured in videos and images shared on social media, underscore the intense demand for affordable rail travel
- To ease crowding, Indian Railways has ramped up the production and deployment of non-AC coaches
- Despite capacity expansion, unmet demand for tickets reached a record high of **3.4 crore** in FY 2025–26

70% of fleet is non-AC now

Between 2022 and 2024, Indian Railways reduced sleeper and general coaches on many trains to add high revenue-generating **3AC/2AC** coaches. The move was later rolled back following public backlash and rising waitlists in non-AC classes. In 2025-26, focus shifted back towards manufacturing more non-AC coaches, which now account for nearly **70%** of the coaches.

3.5% increase in passengers in 1 year

741 cr* (2025-26, *approximate) | 716 cr (2024-25)

Passenger trains increased by **6%** in 5 yrs

13,169 (2019-20) | 13,940 (2024-25)

Sleeper Class and 3AC passengers are the worst affected

Passengers unable to travel due to **waitlisted ticket cancellations**

2021-22*	1.7 crore (Covid year)
2022-23	2.7 crore
2023-24	3 crore
2024-25	3.3 crore
2025-26	3.4 crore

KEY FIGURES

- 2.3 cr — Average passenger journeys per day
- 7,300 — Number of stations
- 1,300 — Stations being redeveloped with modern amenities
- 11,700 — Number of freight trains operating daily
- 13,300 — Passenger trains operating daily
- 89,000 — Number of passenger coaches (approx)

Boost to non-AC coaches

- Nearly **1,250** general coaches were added to long-distance trains in 2024–25, with 860 more added by early 2026
- In 2024, the Railway Board approved **2,500** additional general coaches to increase general coach capacity across trains
- Current policy for a standard 22-coach Mail/Express train aims for 12 non-AC coaches (general + sleeper) and 8 AC coaches, giving priority to affordable options

Why demand outpaces capacity

- Passenger traffic has grown by modest **3–5%** in recent years, but capacity constraints continue to limit the Railways' ability to meet demand
- Annual new track commissioning has more than doubled since 2014 but continues to lag demand; only **900 km** of new lines were commissioned in April–November 2025
- Key High-Density Network corridors operate at **100–150%+** capacity utilisation, with some sections projected to remain above **150%** despite upgrades
- Doubling, tripling and quadrupling projects are underway, but land acquisition, funding and coordination challenges continue to slow execution
- Dedicated Freight Corridors help ease passenger traffic to some extent but mixed traffic on most lines create passenger-freight conflicts

- 164+ — Vande Bharat services
- 30+ — Amrit Bharat trains
- 99.2% — Broad Gauge (BG) network electrified

Capacity improvement

Coach production: **7,134** passenger coaches have been manufactured in FY 2024–25, up 9% from the previous year. Manufacture of nearly 17,000 general and non-AC coaches has been planned over five years

Network expansion: As of March 2025, the railway network stood at **69,439** route kilometres, with a target of adding around **3,500 km** in FY 2025–26

Capital Expenditure: FY26 railway budget increased to **Rs 2.81 lakh crore** from **Rs 2.55 lakh crore** the previous year, with spending focused on new lines, doubling, electrification, station development and safety upgrades

Other initiatives: Station decongestion plans and better crowd management have been initiated at major stations

Fleet focus

- Emphasis is on LHB coaches, Vande Bharat and Amrit Bharat services alongside conventional trains
- New Amrit Bharat Express trains feature more general and sleeper coaches for affordable travel
- General coaches are temporarily augmented during summer, festivals and periods of high demand
- More unreserved MEMU, EMU and Passenger trains operated for short- and medium-distance travel
- Since May 2025, waitlisted passengers have been barred from boarding sleeper and AC coaches to reduce overcrowding

Source: Railway Ministry

Compiled by **Ajith Athrady** DH Graphics: **Guru Prasath R**

70% general and non-AC coaches

When Opposition MPs in Parliament attacked the government during the last Budget session, alleging that it had ignored the poor, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, in his reply, said the Railways continued to serve the poor and that 70% of coaches were general and non-AC coaches. Amrit Bharat trains were providing efficient, modern and safe travel to passengers at very low fares, he said.

Have your say

To express your opinion, e-mail us at: insight@deccanherald.co.in

UAPA, from Page 1

A multi-pronged approach to balancing security, liberty and justice

Critics argue that this approach has often led to mechanical bail denials, even as trials stretch for years.

Low conviction rate

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) paints a grim picture. Between 2014 and 2022, thousands of UAPA cases were registered annually, with peaks around 1,200–1,400. Arrests have been substantial, yet conviction rates remain strikingly low. In recent years, all-India conviction rates under UAPA have hovered between 1.5% and 6% when measured against arrests.

Meanwhile, a significant proportion of cases drag on. Many undertrials spend years in custody before their trials even begin. Chargesheets are frequently delayed, investigations turn complex and adjournments become routine due to witness non-appearance, forensic backlogs and overburdened prosecutors. Special courts, established to expedite terrorism-related cases, often struggle with mixed case dockets, judicial vacancies and inadequate infrastructure, further contributing to delays.

Recognising the problem, the Supreme Court has directed states to establish exclusive courts for UAPA cases, conduct day-to-day hearings and complete trials within one year where feasible, underscoring the urgency. However, implementation remains uneven across jurisdictions. Pendency in the broader criminal justice system, with over 5 crore cases across courts, exacerbates the problem.

The human toll is devastating. Families are torn apart, livelihoods disappear and both mental and physical health deteriorate. Some high-profile cases illustrate these consequences.

Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old Jesuit priest and tribal rights activist, who was arrested under the UAPA in October 2020 in connection with the Bhima Koregaon–Elgar Parishad case, spent nine months in custody. Living with Parkinson's disease, he requested a sipper and straw to meet his basic needs and repeatedly sought bail on medical grounds, but his pleas faced bureaucratic delays. He died in a hospital in July 2021. His case became a symbol of how UAPA can ensnare voices of dissent and how delays compound vulnerability.

Another example is Umar Khalid, who has remained in custody since September 2020. As of mid-2026, the trial in the larger Delhi riots conspiracy case had not made substantial progress, despite the voluminous evidence running into thousands of pages.

Similar stories are reported from Kashmir, Maharashtra and other parts of the country, where activists, students, journalists, and ordinary citizens accused of links with banned organisations await adjudication for years.

Even after acquittal, reintegration becomes challenging due to lost years, social ostracism and economic ruin.

The contrast is instructive. In ordinary criminal cases, undertrials may secure bail more readily, but UAPA's shadow looms large.

UAPA remains vital for counter-terrorism in a country facing real threats from extremism, insurgency and cross-border militancy. Low conviction rates do not necessarily imply misuse; many cases may involve intelligence-driven preventive actions or plea deals. However, when incarceration routinely outlasts the eventual sentence or ends in acquittal, it raises profound questions about proportionality and due process.

Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees not just life but liberty with dignity and speedy justice. As the Supreme Court has noted in its recent observations, unchecked delays risk turning the process into punishment, undermining public faith in the rule of law. Conversely, mechanical bail grants could compromise security and witness safety.

Reforms and action

The May 2026 referral to a larger bench seeks to ensure consistency. Clearer guidelines on when delays justify bail, taking into account factors such as the role of the accused, reasons for delay, progress of the trial and the likelihood of the eventual sentence, could help.

Technology-driven case management, more exclusive special courts, dedicated prosecutors and stricter timelines for chargesheets and trials are essential reforms.

Under Trial Review Committees (UTRCs) need to be strengthened for periodic reviews, especially in the case of vulnerable prisoners. Legal aid must reach UAPA accused persons promptly.

Addressing UAPA delays requires multi-pronged action. Parliament could consider amendments providing for presumptive bail after a defined period. The judiciary must rigorously enforce day-to-day trials. The Executive needs to fill vacancies, upgrade infrastructure and train personnel.

Ultimately, the system must reclaim its core principles: presuming innocence until proven guilty, ensuring that trials conclude swiftly and calibrating restrictions to genuine threats rather than casting wide nets that ensnare the innocent or marginalised.

National security and individual liberty are not zero-sum. A fair and efficient justice system strengthens both.

As undertrials continue to spend years in prison, sometimes longer than the sentences they might eventually receive, the adage rings true: justice delayed is justice denied. In UAPA cases, prolonged delays risk turning this denial into a deeper failure of justice. The conflicting bail rulings are a symptom; chronic delays are the underlying disease demanding urgent attention. Only then can India credibly claim to uphold both national security and the constitutional promise of liberty.

GROUND FOR GROUSE Gadgets replace games; kids' behavioural changes worry doctors

B'luru turns killjoy as children no longer have a field day

BENGALURU, DHNS

As the government pushes a digital detox campaign to reduce screen addiction among children, a question hangs over Bengaluru's rapidly growing suburbs: if children are expected to put their phones away, where exactly are they supposed to go and play?

Across newer neighbourhoods like Varthur, Electronics City, Mahadevapura and KR Puram, residents say free public playgrounds have all but vanished. While apartment complexes and tech parks have surged over the past two decades, accessible public grounds have not kept pace. In many localities, roads outside homes have become children's playgrounds, forcing them to dodge traffic while playing cricket, football or cycling.

What remains are either shrinking open spaces threatened by encroachment and commercialisation or private sports turfs that charge by the hour. The result, according to doctors, residents and citizen activists, is a generation increasingly confined indoors, spending more time on screens and less time engaging in physical activity.

"Forget playgrounds, there are places where there are no proper roads, sewage networks or civic amenities because of unplanned development," says Sandeep Anirudhan, convener of Citizens Agenda for Bengaluru.

He traces the problem to the city's rapid expansion after the IT boom of the 1990s.

"It was deprived of proper planning mechanisms mandated under the 74th Constitutional Amendment. Whatever growth happened after the 1990s was largely unplanned. When planning disappears, amenities disappear first including playgrounds," he says.

For many families, sports itself has become expensive. Residents say children who once played cricket, football or volleyball in neighbourhood grounds are now forced to travel long distances to rely on private facilities that charge between Rs 1,500 and Rs 2,000 an hour for turf bookings.

Children play a game of street cricket amidst tightly packed vehicles in Vasanth Nagar, Bengaluru. DH PHOTOS/B K JANARDHAN

A private playground at RBNMS in Halasuru. The ground, meant for children and community recreation, is among public play spaces being used for commercial activities.

"In our area, if children want to play cricket, they have to book a private turf in advance and pay heavily," says V K Srivatsa of Hemmigepura.

"There are thousands of BDA sites in Banashankari 6th stage, yet we do not have even one dedicated public playground."

Srivatsa says residents often clear clusters of vacant private plots every year to conduct community cricket tournaments because no public ground exists nearby. "Sports have become commercialised. Poor children can no longer simply step out and play," he adds.

Christopher Cruz, executive member of North East Residents Welfare Association, says the problem cuts across Bengaluru. "When we were children, we made do with stones as wickets to play in any open space available. Today, children don't even have a place to run around," he says.

"Even sites originally reserved for playgrounds and civic amenities have often been leased out or repurposed. Private clubs charge lakhs in membership fees. Where will middle-class or lower-income children go?"

In many of Bengaluru's newer layouts, residents say children are increasingly playing in apartment driveways, parking areas and internal roads because there is nowhere else to go. Parents often worry about speeding vehicles and safety risks.

No traditional games

The decline of playgrounds has also accelerated the disappearance of traditional Indian games. Games such as lagori, kho-kho, kabaddi, gilli-danda, buguri (spinning tops), marbles (goli) and kunte bille (hopscotch) that once defined childhoods across Bengaluru are becoming increasingly rare.

"We used to play cricket on roads, marbles, tops, kabaddi and kho-kho," recalls B M Shivakumar, president of Jayaprakash Narayan Vichara Vedike. "Back then, roads were quiet and playgrounds were everywhere. Today, children cannot play on roads because of traffic. There are no open fields left either."

According to Shivakumar, Bengaluru's older layouts were designed differently.

He points to the planning principles adopted by the erstwhile City Improvement Trust Board, which later became Bangalore Development Authority.

"They believed parks and playgrounds were as important as roads, drainage and water supply. In layouts like Jayanagar, Rajajinagar and Malleswaram, playgrounds were deliberately integrated into neighbourhood planning where they mandated public playgrounds within every 3 km. That vision is missing today," he says.

Citizen activist Sneha Nandihal argues that authorities had increasingly prioritised large sporting infrastructure projects over accessible neighbourhood playgrounds.

"Take the Victory Ground in Indiranagar, for instance. it was a lifeline for children from nearby slums to breathe fresh air. Turning these into locked, commercial or institutional spaces is a theft of childhood".

"The moment you create a sports facility, it becomes exclusive to a certain segment of people," she says. "You cannot keep concretising every open space".

Growing health concern

At the Services for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) Clinic at Nimhans, increasing numbers of adolescents are seeking help for excessive technology use.

"There is definitely a rise in treatment-seeking behaviour among adolescents aged 14 to 19," says Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma, professor of clinical psychology and coordinator of SHUT Clinic.

"Many present with excessive screen use, sleep disturbances, procrastination, declining academic performance and lack of interest in physical activity". While screen addiction has multiple causes, Sharma says lack of accessible outdoor spaces cannot be ignored.

"Physical activity is absent in a large number of cases. The reason may be environmental, such as lack of spaces to play or individual factors where children increasingly prefer screens. Either way, outdoor activity is declining".

Citizen groups allege that playgrounds and civic amenity sites reserved in approved layouts have often been encroached upon, commercialised or diverted to other uses. Srivatsa claims that in many layouts, land earmarked for parks and playgrounds has gradually disappeared from public use.

"Residents rarely know what was originally reserved in approved layout plans. That allows these spaces to be leased, commercialised or quietly altered," he says.

Shivakumar points to several examples where civic amenity sites have allegedly been converted into parking lots or other uses. "Land values became more important than community spaces," he says.

But BDA says preserving parks remains a priority. "Whatever lapses have happened in the past, we will try to address them," a senior BDA official told *DH*.

Sustainable transport activists push for Karnataka Active Mobility Bill

Bill will give pedestrians, cyclists legal rights to safe infra

ASRA MAVAD
BENGALURU, DHNS

Advocates of sustainable transport in Bengaluru have renewed their push for the Karnataka Active Mobility Bill (KAMB), arguing that the proposed legislation is essential to improve road safety, strengthen public transport connectivity and promote cleaner urban mobility despite recent amendments to Karnataka Motor Vehicles (KMV) Rules.

Sustainable Mobility Network (SMN), a coalition of organisations working on inclusive urban transport, believes the Bill would give pedestrians and cyclists legal rights to safe infrastructure.

According to data cited by SMN, Karnataka recorded 6,844 pedestrian deaths between 2022 and 2024, while Bengaluru reported 233 pedestrian deaths in 2024.

Pedestrians accounted for 37% of all road fatalities in city between 2017 and 2020. A petition by the organisation calling for the government to table the KAMB has garnered over 11,000 signatures.

The need for the Bill has been highlighted by the Supreme Court's recent declaration that right to walk on safe, demarcated footpaths is a fundamental right.

"As the court rightly pointed out, the Motor Vehicle Act deals with Motor Vehicles, not pedestrians and cyclists. That's why it becomes important to legally establish rights of pedestrians, which in turn will mandate local governments to prioritise designing proper footpaths and make it part of their budgets and ongoing operations and maintenance," said Srinivas Alavilli, Fellow, Integrated Transport and Road Safety, WRI India.

Bangalore South MP Tejasvi Surya also highlighted the same points. "The state government should table and implement the Bill without further delay," he stressed.

The proposed legislation seeks to mandate connected networks of footpaths and cycle tracks, create 20 kmph 'Slow Streets' around schools and hospitals, establish annual infrastructure audits and grievance redressal mechanisms, and legally require motorists to yield to pedestrians and cyclists. It also proposes penalties of up to Rs 2 lakh for violations.

Both Karnataka Motor Vehicles Amendment Rules, 2026, and Active Mobility Bill are equally important within their own domain, believes Sonal Kulkarni, Director, Urbanmorph.

"The KMV Rules tell agencies what to build. But they give pedestrians and cyclists no legal standing to demand it. If your footpath is missing or broken, you have no right under KMV Rules to take action. The Active Mobility Bill changes this. It formally establishes legal right of every person to a safe walking and cycling environment. That shifts the power from the agency to the citizen," she explained, highlighting that the cycling ecosystem has no legal home without the Bill.

"Public bicycle sharing, micro-mobility regulation, cycle parking requirements in buildings, and the right to carry a cycle on public transport — none of this is addressed in the KMV Rules," she added.

CM to lay foundation stone for short tunnel at Hebbal today

BENGALURU, DHNS: Chief Minister D K Shivakumar will lay the foundation stone for the short tunnel planned to decongest traffic at Hebbal Junction on Sunday.

The 2.18-km six-lane tunnel is being constructed by the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA).

The tunnel will pass below the down ramp of the Hebbal flyover and along the edge of Hebbal Lake. It will have entry and exit ramps near Esteem Mall and Baptist Hospital. According to the detailed project report (DPR), the project also includes the construction of a railway underbridge.

The project had drawn immense criticism, with many mobility experts pointing out that it may not add value or help decongest the junction.

Amid the opposition, BDA, however, had floated tenders for the project.

DH earlier reported that Hyderabad-based Rithwik Projects Ltd had bagged the tender and begun initial geotechnical investigations to assess subsurface stability, ground conditions and groundwater levels.

Drunk men threaten to set Kengeri eatery on fire

BENGALURU, DHNS: Five drunk men allegedly threatened to set a restaurant ablaze and attempted to assault its owner after being told the establishment was closed for the day in Kengeri on Friday night.

The incident occurred around 11.30pm at Rajarathna Restaurant near Shirke Apartments.

The five men, who arrived in a large car, sought to know why the lights were still turned on at the restaurant if it was shut. They proceeded to argue with the staff, and threatened to burn the restaurant down. The men subsequently went to the restaurant's parking area where they started drinking.

Restaurant owner Madhu Kiran alleged that this was not the first time the group had come to the restaurant after closing hours and caused a ruckus.

"They came earlier as well after closing time and issued similar threats. This time, we were in a panic, and called the police inspector, who told us, 'Don't you have common sense? Just give a written complaint,'" Kiran told *DH*.

He further alleged that the police did not register an FIR and only registered a Non-Cognisable Report (NCR) and let the accused off instead of taking any stringent action. The incident has left the staff shaken, with a couple of employees not reporting to work on Saturday due to fear, Kiran said.

Walkers to pay Rs 100/yr entry fee on vet college campus

BENGALURU, DHNS

Morning and evening walkers using the Veterinary College campus in Hebbal will now have to pay an entry fee, with the college management introducing a paid pass system to regulate public access to the premises.

Under the new arrangement, visitors will be charged Rs 100 per person for a one-year pass entry to the sprawling campus, which has for years served as a preferred walking destination for residents of surrounding neighbourhoods and fitness enthusiasts.

According to the college management, the initiative is aimed at streamlining access to the campus while ensuring better maintenance, cleanliness and security of the premises. College officials said the fee would also help manage the growing number of visitors and facilitate upkeep of the campus infrastructure.

The management of Veterinary College has launched a paid entry pass system, charging Rs 100 per person for visitors using the campus for walking purpose. DH PHOTO/B K JANARDHAN

The decision has, however, evoked mixed reactions from regular walkers. While some welcomed the move, stating that a nominal fee could improve maintenance and enhance security, others questioned the introduction of charges for a space that has normally remained open to the public.

Watched in salon, rowdy hacked to death on way home

BENGALURU, DHNS: A history-sheeter was allegedly hacked to death after a chase by armed assailants in JP Nagar on Saturday evening. Police suspect the murder was a fallout of an old rivalry.

Raju alias Hallu Muraka Raja (48), a rowdy-sheeter named in murder, attempted murder and robbery cases, was returning home after having tea at around 5.30 pm, when a gang of 5 started chasing him.

The gang waited inside a salon, when he was there for a haircut. The men followed him to the tea stall and attacked him while he was walking back home. They chased Raju and repeatedly hacked him in the middle of a busy road before fleeing.

Police suspect the murder was carried out to avenge the killing of 'Stand' Kutti, a history-sheeter in Banashankari, nearly a decade ago. Raju was an accused in that murder and had spent time in jail with gangster Ballari Shiva.

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Cops seize Rs 2.98 crore in 'unaccounted-for' cash; 2 held

BENGALURU, DHNS:: Mahalakshmi Layout police seized Rs 2.98 crore in cash from a shed at Kurubarahalli and arrested two persons after they failed to produce documents pertaining to the source of the money.

The accused are T M Nagaraj (55) and Venkatesh B (41).

According to police, the seizure was made on June 2, when sub-inspector Rakesh and his team were on night patrol. Acting on a tip-off about cash being stored in a shed at 11th cross, the team conducted a search.

During the inspection, police found the money kept in four bags inside the shed. Senior officers were immediately informed, following which the cash was seized.

Police said the suspects failed to produce valid documents or provide a satisfactory explanation regarding the source of the money. They were taken into custody, the income tax department was informed and an FIR was registered.

During interrogation, the suspects claimed that Nagaraju, who owns a garment factory, had borrowed money from money-lenders due to a property dispute and had kept the cash for repaying the loan.

However, he failed to produce any documents to substantiate the claim.

Venkatesh, who runs a cement business, also could not produce any documents related to the cash, police said.

The income tax department is expected to take over the investigation into the source of the cash, a senior police officer said. A case has been registered under section 98 of the Karnataka Police Act.

ISRO chairman calls for greater synergy with IAF, HAL

BENGALURU, DHNS: Stressing the need for closer collaboration among India's key aerospace institutions, ISRO Chairman and Department of Space Secretary V Narayanan on Saturday said interoperability between the Indian Air Force (IAF), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) would be crucial to achieving the country's long-term strategic and technological goals.

Delivering the keynote address on 'Indian Space Programme: The Challenges and Way Forward' at the 17th Air Chief Marshal LM Katre Memorial Lecture at HAL Management Academy, he outlined India's space vision under Viksit Bharat 2047.

He also paid tribute to the late L M Katre, crediting him with playing a pioneering role in the growth of India's aviation and aerospace sector.

The annual memorial lecture, organised by the Air Force Association in association with HAL, was attended by senior officials from the IAF, the Defence Research and Development Organisation, HAL and other aviation and defence organisations.

Air Marshal H B Rajaram, president of the Air Force Association's Karnataka branch, traced the origins of the memorial lecture and highlighted Katre's contributions during his 42-year career in the IAF and HAL.

HAL chairman and managing director Ravi K spoke on the longstanding relationship between the company and the IAF.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AND IDENTIFICATION WORKS

E-Tender Notice No. GEM/2026 /B/7711041 Dated: 25-06-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below:- **Name of work:** Archival Research and Identification of Land Associated with Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR)/ Cart Road in Compliance with CCMP, ICOMOS, WHC Reports/Guidelines. **Tender Value:** ₹1,12,10,000/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,06,050/-. **Date & time of Closing of tender:** At **15.00** hrs. & opening at **15.30** hrs. on **16-07-2026.** The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website **https://GeM.gov.in**

Director/DHR/Kurseong

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Sl	Tender No	Description in Brief	Tender Due on
1	L8265091C	Supply of Porcelain Bracket insulator **Qty- 2516 Nos.**	20-07-2026 10:30 Hrs.
2	L8265090C	Supply of PORCELAIN STAY ARM INSULATOR **Qty- 2771 Nos.**	20-07-2026 10:30 Hrs.
3	L8265927	Supply, Installation, testing & commissioning LIVE LINE OHE MEASURING GAUGE **Qty- 34 Nos.**	15-07-2026 10:30 Hrs.
4	L8265935	Supply of Joint less grooved Copper Contact Wire **Qty- 2500 MTR.**	16-07-2026 10:30 Hrs.

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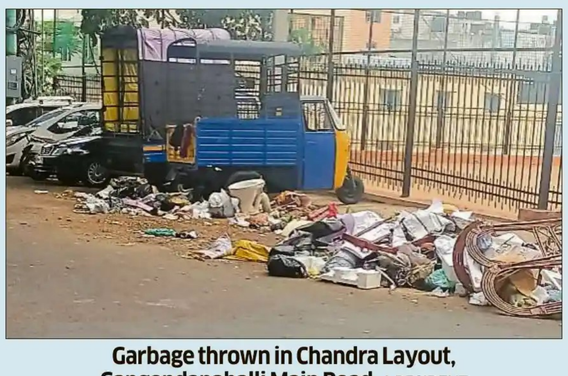
Almost every locality in Bengaluru has a street corner or vacant plot that has turned into an informal garbage dump. These black spots are not merely an eyesore; they are a threat to public health and the environment. Deccan Herald and Prajavani invite citizens to share details and photographs of such sites for publication in these columns, in order to help push for timely action from the authorities. Citizens are also encouraged to share photos of garbage black spots cleared after being highlighted in these columns.



Garbage thrown in Chandra Layout, Gangondanahalli Main Road. A RESIDENT

Meat waste, being thrown by nearby shops on Kogilu Road, Yelahanka. N K SHANKAR, KOGILU

A garbage pile outside the compound wall of R A Mundkar Fire and Emergency Service Academy, Bannerghatta Road, has been getting bigger since June 2025. A RESIDENT

Heaps of garbage strewn on 3rd Main, 4th Cross, Basaveshwara Layout, Vijayanagar. A RESIDENT

Garbage lies uncleared off Hennur Main Road near BensSatya Enclave, causing unhygienic conditions.
AMBAT PREMKUMAR

Garbage accumulation and open burning of waste outside Meda Heights, behind Adarsh Palm, near AET Circle, Bellandur, creates severe air pollution. A RESIDENT

Uncleared debris, construction waste, and garbage dumped on 1st Main Road, Domlur Layout (B-71), in front of Govt First Grade College, behind Sir M Visvesvaraya Kendriya Bhavan, creates an unsanitary and cluttered roadside environment. JOHN

BDA plants lakhs of saplings in world record attempt

Adopt neighbourhoods for tree planting: CM to schools

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) on Saturday carried out a large-scale plantation drive across three locations in Bengaluru as part of its efforts to increase the city's green cover and promote environmental conservation.

The drive was held at Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout, Dr Shivaram Karanth Layout and Banashankari 6th Stage, where over 50,000 volunteers participated in a drive to plant 15 lakh saplings in an attempt to create a Guinness World Record for the most number of saplings planted by a team in the span of 12 hours.

"We were expecting about 50,000 volunteers but we had over 75,000 registrations online. Plus many people also showed up for on-spot registrations," said Manivannan P, Commisioner, BDA.

The volunteers included people of all age groups, including visually and hearing-impaired adults.

Over 340 varieties of native and shade-giving tree species were planted with the aim of improving biodiversity, enhancing air quality and creating healthier neighbourhoods. The choice of species was made keeping in mind their adaptability to the local climate and their long-term ecological benefits.

Manivannan stressed that tree planting must be accompanied by sustained maintenance to ensure high survival rates. The caretaking of the saplings will be the responsibility of the NGOs partnered with BDA on the project. They'll take care of regular watering and periodic monitoring.

Students plant saplings at Kempegowda Layout as part of the BDA's drive to create a world record by planting 15 lakh saplings in 12 hours to mark the 517th birth anniversary of Nadaprabhu Kempegowda, in Bengaluru on Saturday.
DH PHOTO

Public participation

Speaking at the 517th Kempegowda Jayanthi celebrations at the BDA's Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout, Chief Minister D K Shivakumar highlighted the plantation drive, describing the planting of 15 lakh saplings across Bengaluru as a "historic decision" aimed at creating a greener city in line with Nadaprabhu Kempegowda's vision.

Calling for greater public participation, Shivakumar proposed that every school in Bengaluru adopt a neighbourhood for tree planting and maintenance.

He announced that the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) would organise a competition encouraging schoolchildren to plant and nurture trees, saying environmental stewardship must become a community movement rather than a one-time exercise.

HDK dares CM for township debate in farmers' presence

Rejects suggestion for debate at other location

BENGALURU, DHNS

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Saturday renewed his challenge to Chief Minister D K Shivakumar to publicly debate the proposed Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township project at Bidadi, asserting that any discussion on the issue must take place in the presence of the affected farmers.

Addressing a public meeting at Byramangala, Kumaraswamy said the agitation against the township had continued for more than 470 days and dismissed allegations that political parties were driving the protests.

"The farmers are fighting to protect their land. We have not launched this movement. If the chief minister is confident about the project, he should come here and discuss it openly with the farmers," he said.

Rejecting suggestions that the debate be held elsewhere, he said he was prepared to participate only if farmers supporting and opposing the project were both present. "I have no personal prestige attached to this. But I will not hold discussions excluding the farmers," he said.

Magadi Congress MLA H C Balakrishna questioned Kumaraswamy's motives behind the public challenge, saying the Union minister appeared more interested in creating a political confrontation than resolving the issue.

"If the chief minister accepts the invitation, Kumaraswamy should also be prepared to attend. Otherwise, the entire exercise will amount to political theatrics," Balakrishna said.

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy addresses farmers at Byramangala on Saturday with an empty chair reserved for Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on the dais during a public meeting on the proposed Bidadi township project.

MAZE OF ROADS

A drone view of the S M Krishna ten-lane road inaugurated on the occasion of Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Jayanti at Challaghatta in Bengaluru on Saturday.
DH PHOTO/M S MANJUNATH

Farmer injured in tiger attack in Mysuru taluk

MYSURU, DHNS: A 40-year-old farmer suffered injuries in a tiger attack near Bennegere of Mullur Gram Panchayat in Sargur taluk of Mysuru district, on the fringes of Nugu forest under the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, on Saturday.

The injured has been identified as Kiran. The incident occurred around 12 noon, when he was working on his farmland. The tiger hit on his neck and scratched his back. After the workers who were with him screamed, the tiger fled the place.

Kiran was rushed to a private hospital in Mysuru for treatment. The compensation will be paid depending on severity of the injuries, said RFO Anith Raj. The tiger was sighted often and there was an attack on cattle too. Following by complaints, the Forest department staff had kept cages 15 days ago. Combing operations are in progress to rescue the tiger which is suspected to have injured Kiran.

Meanwhile, a 5-year-old leopard died after it was hit by a vehicle on NH 275 Hunsuru-Mysuru Road in Arabithittu forest region of Hunsur taluk, Mysuru district, on Saturday.

Doubled in months: Hoteliers seek LPG price rollback

BENGALURU, PTI: The Karnataka State Hotels Association (KSHA) has urged the Central Government to immediately slash commercial LPG cylinder prices, which have nearly doubled in recent months, citing a sharp decline in global crude oil prices.

G K Shetty, president of the Karnataka State Hotels Association, in a press release, said commercial LPG cylinders were priced at around Rs 1,800 in February. After dealer discounts, hotels procured them for approximately Rs 1,650 to Rs 1,700 per cylinder.

He said the conflict in the Middle East severely disrupted global gas supplies, which gradually recovered to nearly 70% of normal levels.

These disruptions resulted in a steep increase in commercial LPG prices, Shetty said.

Hotels and restaurants are now paying Rs 3,198 per commercial LPG cylinder - almost double what they were paying a few months ago.

As international crude oil prices have now declined to around USD 70 per barrel, roughly the same level as in February, the Association urged the government to reduce prices accordingly.

"In view of the correction in global crude oil prices, we urge the Central government to revise commercial LPG cylinder prices accordingly. We request that, from July onwards, the price of commercial LPG cylinders be brought back to the February level so that the hotel industry receives much-needed relief," Shetty said.

Hotels and restaurants are now paying Rs 3,198 per commercial LPG cylinder - almost double what they were paying a few months ago. PTI FILE PHOTO

PU lecturers oppose fiat to teach Class 9 and 10

HUBBALLI, DHNS: Karnataka State PU College Lecturers and Principals' Association has urged the state government to withdraw its circular mandating them to teach Classes 9 and 10. It has warned of staging a protest if their demand is not met.

Dharwad District PU College Lecturers' Association president R K Rangannavar said the government has issued circular without discussing the plan with educationalists and lecturers. "PU lecturers not only teach lessons, but also prepare students for competitive exams. The govt's move will affect the academic progress rather than benefiting students."

HC awards Rs 20L to Udupi couple whose only son died in accident

BENGALURU, DHNS

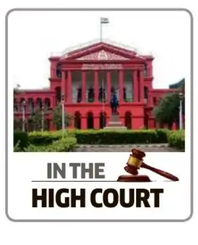
The High Court of Karnataka has awarded Rs 20.11 lakh in enhanced total compensation to the parents of a 12-year-old schoolboy, who died in an accident in 2018.

The accident tribunal at Karkala in Udupi district had awarded Rs 7.87 lakh as compensation.

On May 20, 2018, Rakshit Kumar, a class 6 student, was at a bus stop outside his school with his family members. At that time, a tourist minibus, travelling from Mulki Vijaya College Road, and a truck, from Mangaluru, collided with each other. As a result of the collision, the minibus turned turtle and fell on the schoolboy. He sustained grievous injuries and succumbed to his injuries on the way to the hospital.

The tribunal awarded Rs 7.87 lakh compensation with 8% interest, including Rs 7.02 lakh compensation under 'loss of dependency'.

The parents filed an appeal contending that the deceased was their only son and had a good future. They further submitted that a huge sum was spent on hospital and ambulance charges. The insurance company of the offending vehicle filed a separate appeal seeking reduction in compensation.



A division bench comprising Justices Jayant Banerji and Tara Vitasta Ganju noted that the award under challenge has not yet attained finality. It further said that in Shivaleela vs United India Insurance Company Limited case, the high court itself has specified that in a beneficial legislation like the Motor Vehicles Act, if any enhancement is to be given, it is to be made in terms of the law as on that date.

The bench noted that compensation needs to be increased considering that in 2018, the notional income as per the chart of Karnataka State Legal Services Authority is Rs 12,500 per month as against the Rs 6,000 per month income taken for computing the compensation by the tribunal. The bench said the reworked compensation under 'loss of dependency' would be Rs 18.9 lakh as against Rs 7.02 lakh determined by the tribunal. The bench modified the amounts awarded under loss of consortium as well as funeral expenses and enhanced the compensation amount by Rs 12.24 lakh. However, the interest payable was fixed at 6%, while partly allowing the appeal filed by the insurer.

India ranked 16 in Responsible Nations Index

BENGALURU, DHNS: India secured 16 rank in the Responsible Nations Index (RNI) global rankings released by the World Intellectual Foundation in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Indian Institute of Management Mumbai (IIM Mumbai).

This RNI is an abridged Global Report covering 154 countries based on various frameworks including Internal responsibility, Environmental responsibility, External Responsibility.

Singapore topped the globe with rank 1 followed by Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Czechia, Belgium, Austria, Ireland, Georgia, Croatia, Germany, Portugal, Bulgaria, Norway and India.

"The RNI underscores a crucial global insight: Responsibility is not a by-product of wealth, but political will, institutional integrity, and long-term commitment to equity and social justice," reads the report.

The RNI reveals a decisive shift in how national performance must be understood in the 21st century. The data shows that responsibility is not correlated with GDP.

"Several high income nations that excel in economic output often fall behind in climate ethics, peaceful conduct, or equitable welfare delivery. Many developing countries outperform advanced economies in environmental stewardship and peaceful conduct, proving that responsibility stems more from political economic wealth," the report says.

Meanwhile, the report also expressed concern over escalating geopolitical militarisation, chronic shortfalls in climate responsibility, and widening inequities in access to public goods and services.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Foundation stone laying ceremony: Foundation stone for the 3-lane twin-tunnel road work to be laid by Chief Minister D K Shivakumar; Hebbal Junction; 9 am.

Rotary District President Installation: Installation ceremony of Rotary District President Ravishankar Dakoju and team; Chief Guest: Maneka Gandhi, PDG K P Nagesh to be present, Mangala Mantapa, NMKRV College, Jayanagar, 9.30 am.

Koti Chennaya Sports Meet: Inauguration by N Nagaraju, presided over by M Ramesh Bangera and S Dhruvi; Billava Association, Kittur Rani Chennamma Stadium, Jayanagar, 10 am.

Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences: 31st Foundation Day, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan to inaugurate, Governor Thawarchand Gehlot to preside; Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and S Abdul Nazeer to be present, Sree Kanteerava Stadium, Sampangiramnagar, 11 am.

CULTURAL

Harmonium Festival: Concert by students of Bijapure Harmonium Foundation; Performances/Accompaniment by Kedar Nafade, Madurai T N Seshagopalan, M B Prakash, Ravi Benne, Sanjeev Das Mahapatra, Badri Vithal, Subhash Dasakkar and Ravindra Gururaj Katoti; Gayana Samaja, Basavanagudi; 9.30 am.

International Poetry Meet: Three poetry sessions from 10 am to 3.30 pm, followed by the valedictory session at 3.45 pm; Address by O L Nagabhushanaswamy, guests: Udayan Vajpeyi, Mohan Kondajji and K N Srinivasa Jogi; presided over by Baraguru Ramachandrappa; Bahumukhi; Kondajji Basappa Hall, Palace Road; 10 am.

Dance Confluence (Nritya Sammilana): Bharatanatyam performances by Manasa Ranga and Divya Vijayalakshmi, guests: Bharadwaj Dayanidhi and Gururaj Vasishta; Natanam Dance Institution; Medai The Stage, Museum Road, Shantala Nagar, Richmond Town; 10 am.

Ambi Utsav: Birth anniversary celebration of Ambareesh; Nirmalanandanatha Swami to take part, inauguration by Basavaraj Bommai; guests: N A Haris and Rakesh Singh; Symphony Swara Prathishtana, Town Hall, 4.30 pm.

Invites to be published in this column should be sent to: **incitytoday@deccanherald.co.in.** Please note that hard copies will not be accepted

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Generally cloudy sky with Light rain

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	30.6°C
Minimum	21.3°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	--
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	58%
Sunset (June 28)	6:49 pm
Sunrise (June 29)	5:56 am
Moonrise	6:46 pm
Moonset	3:27 pm

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

INTERVIEW

Minorities get benefits they are entitled to, how's that appeasement?: Hariprasad

'We should go to people for next election with caste census'

B K Hariprasad (71), who took charge as KPCC president, brings 53 years of organisational experience with him. In an exclusive interview with *DH*'s **Prathima Nandakumar**, the four-time Rajya Sabha MP and Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist details his cadre-centric strategy, ideological focus and plans to prepare Congress for crucial elections. Excerpts:

When D K Shivakumar took KPCC reins in 2020, he pushed for a cadre-based party and digital outreach. What are your ideas?
Shivakumar is a political activist focussing on legislative politics. My politics is purely from the point of organisation. I've worked in NSUI, Youth Congress and INTUC. Naturally, I have to build the party through cadre, not through power politics.

Shivakumar is accused of soft-Hindutva and you are a vocal critic of Hindutva.
For Shivakumar, keeping Congress alive is perhaps more important than ideology. For me, ideology is the base of Congress. I stand for the Constitution, secular ethos and Congress' ideology. There is no compromise.

You said, "If people want to work for the party they should come to you. If they want power, they should go to CM".
I don't want people to waste their time. The entire country is at the crossroads. We need more political activists who can work in the party to defeat the ideology of BJP and RSS. To protect the idea of India, we need strong, committed cadre. I do not want people to choose the party, merely to gain access to power.

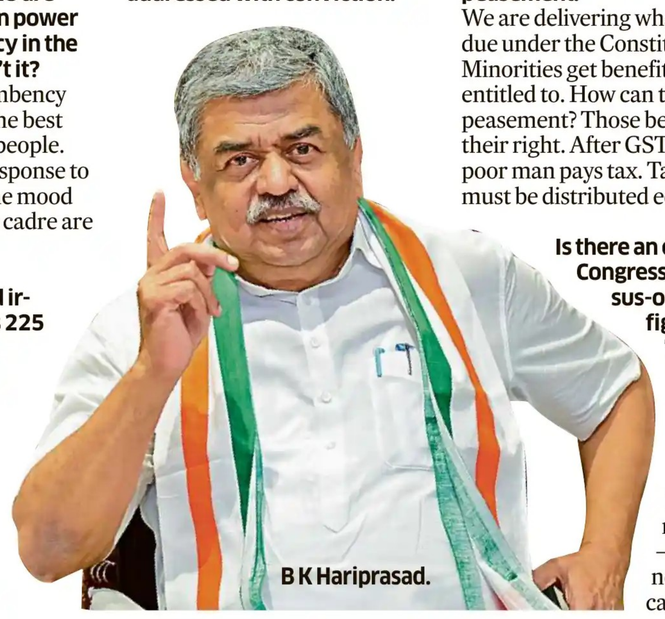
Your priorities as crucial polls (GBA, local body and the 2028 Assembly polls) are close?
I have a huge challenge before me. That is why I have dedicated these 2 years to party workers, to strengthen party at all levels.

Polls in 2023 and 2028 are different. The party in power faces anti-incumbency in the coming elections, isn't it?
There is no anti-incumbency now as we are doing the best for the welfare of the people. The overwhelming response to my elevation shows the mood at the grassroots. The cadre are not complacent.

Audit reports flagged irregularities worth Rs 225 crore in guarantees.
Wherever there are loopholes, people exploit and misuse the system. We will set that right. A majority have benefited and live with self-respect. The misuse needs to be investigated.

With Siddaramaiah's exit, is there a vacuum in Ahinda leadership?
No. Ahinda is an offshoot of social justice. Congress believes in social justice. Siddaramaiah focussed on deprived weaker sections. I believe in social justice that cares for the poor even among upper castes. These sections have been with us for decades. Indira Gandhi nationalised banks and abolished privy purses. Rajiv Gandhi prepared youth for the 21st century. Congress keeps evolving.

Key Ahinda issues – caste survey, SCs' internal reservation, Muslims' concerns – were not addressed with conviction.
Ahead of next election, we should go to the people with caste census (by implementing its report). When we try to empower people and alter the social fabric, opposition comes from those with privilege. When Devaraj Urs introduced the Havanur Commission report, the copy was burnt in the Assembly. V P Singh government's Mandal report was met with protests. Yet, society moved forward. The cow slaughter issue is under discussion. We have taken a decision on Hijab. The key thing is to maintain peace.


B K Hariprasad.

Congress and Siddaramaiah are accused of minority appeasement.
We are delivering what is due under the Constitution. Minorities get benefits they are entitled to. How can that be appeasement? Those benefits are their right. After GST, even a poor man pays tax. Tax money must be distributed equally.

Is there an original Congressman-versus-outsiders fight?
There was no such fight. People came for ideological reasons — you can no longer call them outsiders. Janata Dal was feudal. BJP is largely upper castes. Congress represents all sections. If it comes to that, we need a microscope to see who is really loyal.

Why is it difficult for Congress to appoint a Dalit CM?
Struggle for representation continues because those who control resources don't surrender power easily. In Karnataka, the demand for a Dalit CM is there because we have tall leaders like Mallikarjun Kharge, G Parameshwara, H C Mahadevappa and K H Muniyappa.

Your view on BJP and BJP-JD(S) alliance?
BJP does not have people-oriented programmes, leadership or vision. It only wants to capture power to establish Hindu Rashtra. People will never allow that. Congress works with the people. There are cracks in the alliance. If they cannot control their own organisations, how can they control state politics?

The Congress, which criticises BJP's Operation Kamala, is accused of luring MLAs in Legislative Council polls.
We had clear numbers for all 5 seats — enough for four candidates and second-preference votes for fifth. We did not approach anybody. They voted as per their conscience. We did not have to lure anybody. It is their own mess.

'Negligence' led to cross-voting in MLC polls, says BJP panel report

Blames Congress for adopting 'unethical means'

BENGALURU, DHNS

The BJP's fact-finding committee probing cross-voting by party lawmakers in the June 18 Legislative Council polls submitted its report, highlighting how 'negligence' led to 12 NDA votes ultimately helping Congress.

The committee's members, senior MLC C T Ravi and former minister N Mahesh, submitted the report to BJP state president B Y Vijayendra. MLA Mahesh Tenginkai was also a committee member.

Ravi said the committee drew up a list of MLAs suspected to have cross-voted and held talks with them.

"We held discussions with candidates, gathered their views, spoke to JD(S) leaders, collected information from media and held discussions with the Leader of the Opposition and the chief whip. After considering locally available information and circumstantial evidence, we prepared the report," Ravi explained.

He declined to divulge contents of the report, saying it was "an internal matter" of the party. He refused to comment on whether or not the report named MLAs involved in cross-voting.

C T RAVI
MLC

"The fact-finding committee's report identified what the party should have and could have done to prevent the cross-voting.

"There were 12 instances of cross-voting by NDA lawmakers. BJP lost four votes, including one invalid vote," Ravi said.

"Two of the BJP's candidates were allotted 30 votes each. One candidate received 29 votes, including the invalid one. The other candidate received 27 votes, 3 short of what was expected. The JD(S) candidate should've received 22 votes, but got only 14 - a shortfall of 8 votes," he said.

MLAs did not cross-vote out of admiration for Congress, Ravi said. "The Congress engineered cross-voting through unethical means".

Ravi said the committee's report identified what the party should have and could have done to prevent cross-voting.

Asked whether there would be a final report, he said the party president would decide the next course of action after discussions in the party's core committee.

In the June 18 elections, the Congress won five out of the seven MLC seats, while the BJP won two.

The JD(S) fielded a candidate, despite not having sufficient numbers.

Statewide pulse polio drive from today; 36k booths set up

BENGALURU, DHNS: The National Pulse Polio Immunisation programme will be launched across the state on Sunday for children under the age of five.

The programme will be launched by CM D K Shivakumar at his Sadashivanagar residence in the presence of Health Minister U T Khader.

The health department has set up vaccination centres and booths at metro, railway and bus stations. The programme targets about 64.84 lakh children across the state. A total of 36,076 vaccination booths have been set up.

A mobile app called 'Nearby Vaccination' has been launched to help parents locate nearest centre. Each child will be administered two drops of the oral vaccine.

Now, it's MLA vs MP of saffron party over Kempegowda Jayanti event

BENGALURU, DHNS

Vishwanath

K Sudhakar

If its own lawmakers cross-voting to help Congress was not enough, the BJP faced a fresh bout of infighting when Yelahanka MLA S R Vishwanath and Chikballapur MP Dr K Sudhakar engaged in a public spat on Saturday.

Vishwanath and Sudhakar, who are not the best of friends, went after each other in an open turf war.

Since 2008, Vishwanath has been helming Kempegowda Jayanti celebrations in Yelahanka. "But for the first time, Sudhakar is organising his own celebrations," the Yelahanka MLA said, adding that neither he nor his team was invited. "I said we shouldn't have two celebrations. But he didn't listen."

The Yelahanka constituency comes under the Chikkaballapur Lok Sabha segment.

Sudhakar, who lost the 2023 Assembly election from the Chikkaballapur Assembly constituency, became the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate a year later. Vishwanath, who wanted his son to get the ticket, was unhappy with Sudhakar's candidature.

"Sudhakar has been dividing the BJP and party workers. He has done the same thing now with the Kempegowda Jayanti celebrations," Vishwanath said. The MLA even dared Sudhakar to contest from Yelahanka or that he would challenge him in Chikkaballapur.

"If Vishwanath has the guts, let him come to Chikkaballapur," Sudhakar said. "Let him contest from any party's ticket, or as an independent candidate. I'm ready to contest from Yelahanka, too, as an individual. But I'm a BJP worker, and I'll do what my party says," he said.

Sudhakar said Vishwanath should have respectfully accepted the invitation and joined the Kempegowda Jayanti celebration.

"He should have stood by the (Vokkaliga) community that has helped him win the elections several times. Instead, he chose to use the event to further his own interests," Sudhakar said.

Vijayapura hosts matrimonial meet for 'positive' people

VIJAYAPURA, DHNS: In what could be termed as first-of-its-kind, a matrimonial meet was organised for the HIV infected in Vijayapura on Saturday. More than 300 persons living with HIV from Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Belagavi, Koppal, Kalaburagi, Mysuru, Gadag, Bengaluru and other districts participated in the meet.

HIV-affected persons in 18-45 age group of all castes were allowed to participate. The parents of the brides and bridegrooms were also present and marriage negotiations were conducted in their presence.

Most of the participants were looking for partners from their caste. Finally, the marriage of 10 couple was fixed.

They will register their marriage at the office of sub-registrar, Vijayapura.

The unique matrimonial meet was the brainchild of Dr Mallanagouda Biradar, the programme officer of District Aids Prevention and Control Committee.

Speaking to *DH*, Dr Biradar said that marriage amongst HIV infected could check the spread of infection by 15% to 20%.

He added that the the children born out of this wedlock can be treated with antiviral drugs to ensure that they do not contract the infection.

V-P suggests linking rivers to resolve inter-state water disputes

BENGALURU, DHNS

Vice-President C P Radhakrishnan offers tributes to the portrait of Nadaprabhu Kempegowda on the occasion of his 517th birth anniversary celebrations in Bengaluru on Saturday. Adichunchanagiri Mutt seer Nirmalanandanath Swami, Opposition leader R Ashoka, former minister C N Ashwath Narayan and others are seen.

Vice-President (V-P) C P Radhakrishnan on Saturday stressed the need for river-linking projects to resolve inter-state water disputes, stressing that the interests of farmers across all states must remain paramount.

He said water flowing into the sea should be harnessed for agriculture, and expressed confidence that phased river-linking initiatives would eventually benefit farmers nationwide.

He was addressing the 517th birth anniversary celebrations of Kempegowda in Bengaluru.

The Vice-President said Kempegowda's visionary leadership laid the foundation for an inclusive and sustainable Bengaluru, describing the city as a true "Mini-Bharat" that reflects the founder's ideals even after five centuries.

He said the city's founder was remembered not merely as a ruler but as a statesman who worked for the people's welfare. He said Kempegowda envisioned a city where farmers, traders, artisans, scholars and people of different faiths could live and prosper together in harmony.

Highlighting Kempegowda's contributions to urban planning, he said the establishment of interconnected lakes, rajakaluves, tree plantations and planned commercial zones demonstrated remarkable foresight in environmental conservation and sustainable development. He said Bengaluru's reputation as a green and vibrant city was rooted in these enduring principles.

He praised Kempegowda's social reforms, including efforts to eliminate regressive customs and promote dignity and inclusivity. Urging young people to draw inspiration from the 16th-century ruler, he called upon them to contribute to nation-building via innovation, public service and social responsibility.

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, union ministers H D Kumaraswamy, V Somanna, leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka and others were present.

Bid to kill Youth Cong office-bearer foiled

▸ **BENGALURU, DHNS:** The Central Crime Branch said that an alleged plot to kill state Youth Congress general secretary Abbas Hussain was foiled with the arrest of 7 people, including 2 relatives of slain history-sheeter Hyder Ali.

The arrested are Shakeel, Sumant, Shivaprasad, Sharavana alias Sonu, Vinod alias Juttu, Nishant and Prem. Police said the gang conspired to kill Hussain to avenge the murder of Hyder, who was hacked to death in Ashok Nagar station limits a year ago. Investigators said Hyder's brother Shabbir Ali had given a contract to eliminate Abbas and the gang had assembled 30 lethal weapons, including long machetes, knives and daggers.

It was preparing to execute the attack using cars and bikes. Acting on a tip-off, CCB arrested the suspects and seized the weapons. Shabbir remains at large.

Declare state drought-hit: Bommai

▸ **HUBBALLI, DHNS:** Haveri MP Basavaraj Bommai urged the government on Saturday to declare the state as drought-hit, following poor monsoon.

The state will face a drought situation, if there are no rains for a week, he said. Bommai told reporters here that the government should immediately declare drought and take appropriate measures.

"Only 30% of sowing has been done. If there is no rain for another week, drinking water crisis will arise," he said.

The government should seek ground reports from DCs and drought relief measures should be implemented using disaster relief fund, he said.

Despite warnings about El Niño effect, the government had not taken necessary measures, the former CM said.

Over 100 fall ill after consuming prasada at temple

▸ **PAVAGADA (TUMAKURU DIST), DHNS:** More than 100 devotees took ill after consuming prasada distributed at a religious event in K Sevalalpura of Nagalamadike hobli in Pavagada taluk.

Devotees from Karnataka and various parts of Andhra Pradesh took part in the ritual held on Thursday and consumed prasad served at the temple. Shortly after, some of the devotees complained of vomiting, stomach ache and fatigue. They were shifted to various hospitals in Pavagada for treatment. However, some more devotees fell ill on Friday and Saturday.

A team of health workers and doctors is treating the affected at the anganwadi centre in the village.

BRS targets Revanth govt over K'taka's letter on projects across Tungabhadra

It's building three barrages across river sans approvals: Harish Rao

S N V SUDHIR
HYDERABAD, DHNS

The Opposition BRS in Telangana has found fresh ammunition to target the Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy-led Congress government, in the form of a letter from Karnataka's Water Resources Secretary Gaurav Gupta.

Flashed by the BRS senior leader and former minister T Harish Rao at a press conference, the letter reveals that Gupta had explicitly urged the Telangana government not to raise any objections to the Chikkamanchale and Chikalparavi projects on the Tungabhadra river.

This, the letter indicated, was in exchange for Karnataka granting a 'no objection' to Telangana's proposed Narayanpet-Kodangal Lift Irrigation Project, he claimed.

Gupta wrote to his Telangana counterpart in July last year as a follow-up to a meeting between irrigation and water resources officials from both states held in last May.

Addressing reporters on Saturday, Harish Rao alleged that Karnataka is illegally constructing three barrages on the Tungabhadra — the Kurudi (2 tmcft), Chikalparavi Bridge-cum-Barrage (2.5 tmcft), and Chikkamanchale Bridge-cum-Barrage (5 tmcft), totalling 9.5 tmcft, all without requisite approvals.

He charged that Revanth Reddy failed to raise this issue at the recent three-state Chief Ministers' meeting and secured no assurance from Union Minister C R Patil to halt the construction.

"Karnataka's additional chief secretary's letter to our irrigation secretary explicitly says: do not raise objections to these projects, stay silent, and do not bring them to the Central government's notice," Rao said.

He further alleged that despite construction having crossed the one-year mark and being more than halfway complete, the Revanth Reddy government has raised no objections either to the Centre or to the Krishna Board, amounting, he said, to collusion with Karnataka.

"If Karnataka holds back a total of 45 tmcft through the 35 tmcft Naveli project and the 9.5 tmcft barrages upstream, the Rajaolibanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) will receive less than 5 tmcft. Water flows to Srisailam will shrink, and the Palamuru district will be completely desertified," he warned.

Referring to the recent meeting of the chief ministers of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka on the sidelines of the Tungabhadra gates inauguration, Harish Rao called Revanth Reddy's claims of a "historic agreement" completely laughable and severely detrimental to Telangana's interests.

He pointed out that Karnataka is planning to construct the 'Navali Reservoir' with a capacity of 35 tmcft, downstream of the Tungabhadra and upstream of the RDS, while Andhra Pradesh has drawn up plans for the 'Gundrevula' project with a capacity of 20 tmcft, downstream of the RDS and upstream of Sunkesula.

"The combined storage of 55 tmcft between Karnataka and AP will cause grave injustice to Telangana," he said.

Citing the 2013 Brijesh Kumar Tribunal judgment, Rao noted that water allocations cannot be made to the Gundrevula project, and that alternatives, not new construction, should be sought if siltation is the concern.

He alleged that the project, which BRS had successfully kept in cold storage through sustained opposition during its nine-and-a-half years in power, has been revived only because a political follower of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu now occupies the Chief Minister's chair in Telangana.

Rao further alleged that at the three chief ministers' meeting, Telangana's Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy and the state's engineers were not permitted inside the room and were made to wait outside.

Only the three chief ministers and Union Water Resources Secretary Kantarao were present.

"Revanth Reddy must reveal to the people what agreement was reached in that closed-door meeting, especially given that Kantarao is said to have connections to AP and to have been appointed as Central Secretary through Chandrababu Naidu's influence," he said.

5 on pilgrimage killed in road accident near Koppal

KOPPAL, DHNS: Five persons, including three of a family, died and five others sustained serious injuries after the Omni van in which they were travelling was hit by a mini-goods vehicle on National Highway 63 near Bhanapur in Kuknoor taluk of Koppal district in the early hours of Saturday.

The deceased are Kenchamma Balikai (35), her husband Shivaji Balikai (40) and their son Chinmay (18), van driver Ramesh Ballari (45) and Amrutha Kotyal (25). They were all residents of Kabbur village in Haveri district. They were on a pilgrimage to Mantralaya when an overspeeding mini-goods vehicle jumped the divider and rammed into the Omni killing three on the spot. The impact was so hard that the body parts of the deceased were found scattered all over the road.

Rescuers and ambulance drivers had a tough time putting together all body parts and shifting the injured to hospital. Two persons died at the hospital. Of the 5 injured, the condition of 2 is said to be critical.

Speaking to repoters after a spot visit, Koppal Superintendent of Police Ram L Arasiddi said the impact resulted in higher casualties as the goods vehicle was carrying heavy spare-parts of an earthmoving machine. ""We have arrested the driver of the goods vehicle," he said.

STEAM-based classes to be introduced at KPS schools

Move to enable students in deciding career path early

BENGALURU, DHNS

In a bid to enable students to decide on the paths their careers will take right from high school, the Department of School Education and Literacy has decided to introduce STEAM-based – Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics – classes for high school students at Karnataka Public Schools (KPS) from the current academic year.

As part of the new initiative, students will be taught lessons on robotics and coding so as to improve their problem solving skills, said an official from the School Education Department. "This is meant to cultivate interest in science and technology, besides kindling their creative spirit," the official added.

Pointing out that most students gravitated towards STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – in higher education, the official added, "For the first time, the government is introducing these subjects at state-run schools, with the addition of Arts."

The distinguishing feature of STEAM classes will be that concept-based learning through experiments will be emphasised over more conventional methods of teaching. In fact, the initiative has already been rolled out at a school in Chikkamagaluru, where children are learning coding, Computer Science, AI and other STEAM subjects.

"Many private schools have introduced STEM subjects right from class six considering the demand they have on the global job market. So, this is an encouraging move geared towards preparing our students," said the headmaster of a government school.

A Science teacher at a government school expressed delight with the government introducing Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence classes. "Inclusion of STEAM-based classes will prove beneficial," the teacher said.

STEAM-based classes will be introduced at the 300 KPS schools that are currently up and running across the state, with 800 more having been announced.

"STEAM-based classes will provide a solid foundation for the children's future," said the School Education Department official.

Recently, M S Ramaiah group unveiled a higher education institution dedicated to Science, Technology, Engineering and Management.

Bidadi township debate turns tense as rival...

Bidadi, from Page 3

Addressing the gathering, Kumaraswamy accused the state government of ignoring the concerns of farmers opposed to the project and alleged that the township would result in the felling of nearly 10 lakh trees, including coconut, arecanut and banana plantations.

"On one hand, the government speaks about planting lakhs of saplings in Bengaluru. On the other hand, it is preparing to cut down fully grown trees here in the name of development," he said.

Among those opposing the project was local farmer Shekhar N, who said generations of families depended on the fertile agricultural land. "We are not against development. But this project will erase our farms and livelihoods. Once the land is gone, it can never be brought back," he said.

However, KG Girish, a farmer who supports the proposal, argued that the township would transform the region. "Young people here need jobs. The township will bring industries, better roads and development. Most landowners are willing to cooperate, but politics has created unnecessary confusion," he said.

Supporters of the project disputed Kumaraswamy's claim that a majority of farmers opposed the township, insisting that many landowners had already consented to acquisition. They alleged that "misinformation" was fuelling resistance.

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Ram temple donations: SIT...

Ram temple, from Page 3

Sources said that the interim report had found some Ram Temple Trust office-bearers guilty of laxity. It is also believed to have raised questions on the appointment of relatives of some office-bearers in the Trust.

Sources said that the interim report had recommended reconstituting the Trust and appointment of a CEO on the lines of Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi. It has also suggested weekly audit of the cash offerings and daily entry of the same in the register. The SIT was formed on June 15 after allegations of 'embezzlement' of crores of rupees in offerings at the Ram temple.

Film producer's son dies of cardiac arrest during trekking

HOSANAGAR (SHIVAMOGGA DIST), DHNS: Kannada film producer B M Harish's son Ullas (28) died of cardiac arrest near Kodachadri hill in the taluk on Saturday.

Ullas had gone for a trek to Kodachadri hills with his friend Suresh at 6.30 am.

While returning after visiting the Sarvajna Peetha atop the hill, he suffered a massive heart attack in front of the temple near the tourist bungalow and collapsed all of a sudden.

His friends arranged for artificial respiration for Ullas on the spot and shifted him to the general hospital by ambulance. He died on the way to the government hospital in Hosanagar for further treatment.

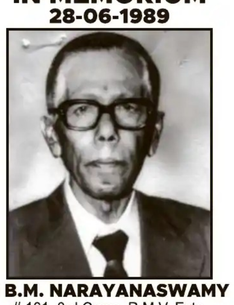
Ullas, who had come to Kodachadri hills with friends on a package tour organized by a Bengaluru organization, had recently got engaged to a girl. The wedding was scheduled for December.

The police have registered a case.

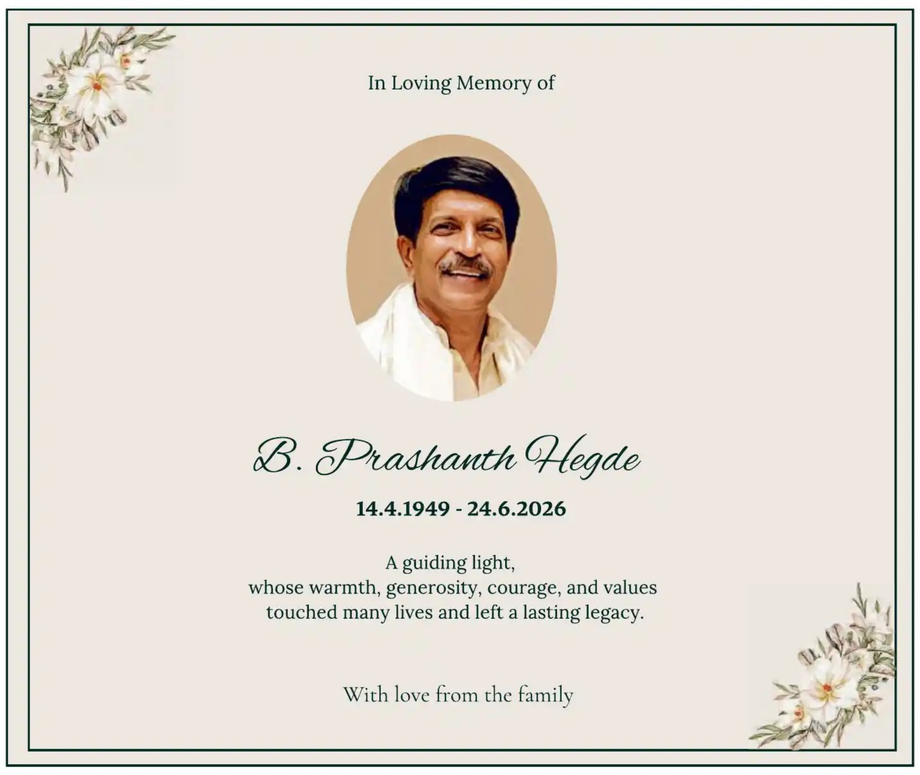
COME CLEAN ON NEET

The members of the Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress Committee take out a torchlight procession demanding resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over leakage of NEET question papers, in Bengaluru on Saturday. DH PHOTO/RANJU P

IN MEMORIUM
28-06-1989



Sri B.M. NARAYANASWAMY
161, 3rd Cross, R.M.V. Extn.
Sadashivnagar, Bangalore. Ph: 23616151
"Dear Anna, It is 37 years since you left us, but not a single day passes without you passing through our mind."
Family members


In Loving Memory of
B. Prashanth Hegde
14.4.1949 - 24.6.2026
A guiding light,
whose warmth, generosity, courage, and values
touched many lives and left a lasting legacy.
With love from the family

Functional disability key in accident compensation: SC

Compensation, From Page 3

"The disability of the appellant has to be appreciated and assessed in the context of the occupation of the appellant... The functional disability of the appellant claimant has to be taken properly and reasonably at 100%," the bench ruled.

The court noted that while the medical disability was certified at 70%, it did not reflect the real economic loss suffered by Dutt, who could no longer practise his craft effectively.

Referring to earlier judgments, including Jagdish vs Mohan (2018), the bench underscored that compensation must adequately cover not just medical expenses and loss of income — including future prospects — but also pain, suffering, trauma and the inability to lead a normal life.

The top court criticised the high court for restricting Dutt's notional monthly income to Rs 5,000, pointing out that his evidence of earning Rs 8,000–10,000 per month had gone largely unchallenged.

It maintained the multiplier of 15, considering his age of 38 at the time of the accident.

In a notable addition, the Supreme Court awarded Rs 10 lakh specifically towards the cost and lifetime maintenance of an artificial leg.

The bench observed that a prosthetic limb requires periodic replacement and repairs, and adequate compensation on this count is essential to help the victim regain some semblance of normalcy.

"Amputation of a limb from the human body has its own effect on the working ability, earning capacity and quality of life in general," the court said.

The June 24, 2026, ruling reiterated that the quantum of compensation must correspond directly to the loss of earning capacity, viewed through the lens of the claimant's socio-economic background and the specific demands of their vocation.

With this order, the Supreme Court has sent a clear message that courts should adopt a realistic and humane approach while determining just compensation in motor accident cases, particularly for skilled workers whose livelihoods are devastated by disabilities that medical certificates alone may not fully capture.

Court summons Priyank, Nalapad over remarks on RSS

BENGALURU, DHNS: A special court in Bengaluru has issued summons to Home Minister Priyank Kharge and state youth Congress leader Mohammed Haris Nalapad in a private complaint alleging that the Congress leaders made "defamatory" remarks against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

An Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Court directed Kharge and Nalapad to appear before it on July 21.

The private complaint was filed by Tejas A, an RSS member and resident of Bengaluru, in November 2025.

The complaint also named former minister Dinesh Gundu Rao. However, the court dropped allegations against Rao.

"Cognizance is taken of the offence under Sec. 356 of BNS (Criminal defamation), 2023 against the accused Nos. 1 and 3 (Kharge and Nalapad). The proceedings against accused No.2 (Dinesh Gundu Rao) are dropped. Office is directed to register this case as C.C (Criminal Case) and issue summons to the Accused Nos. 1 and 3 returnable by 21/07/2026," the court said.

The complaint was filed close on the heels of the government's circular directing private organisations to seek permission prior to holding events at government premises like schools and parks. The circular was allegedly aimed at curbing RSS activities.

During the issuance of this circular, Kharge had written a letter to the then chief minister Siddaramaiah in October 2025, requesting a ban on RSS activities on government premises, including schools and grounds.

Derogatory posts

The complaint said Priyank subsequently posted on social media allegedly derogatory remarks against the RSS. Nalapad too had posted certain "derogatory" comments against the RSS on social media.

Several courts receive hoax bomb threat e-mails

BENGALURU, DHNS: Various district courts across the state received hoax bomb e-mails for second time this week, on Saturday.

The principal district and sessions court in Karwar, Uttara Kannada district, received a mail saying that explosives have been planted in e-administration office and record room of the court. The police conducted a thorough search, but did not find any bomb.

Sources in the police said that security at the court was being beefed up since bomb threat mails are being received very frequently.

A similar threat claiming that bombs have been planted in the district court and tahsildar's office was received at the official e-mail of the district court. On getting information, the police personnel along with sniffer dogs and bomb disposal squad conducted a thorough search of the building. No explosives were found during the search.

A mail sent to Bagalkot district court claimed that two time bombs have been planted in e-service centre and three bombs in record room of the court, and that they would go off at 2.10 pm. However, a search established the claim to be hoax.

Udupi district court received similar threat mail for the second time. The mail in English was received at the Principal District and Sessions Court on the night of June 26.

A bomb detection and disposal squad and a dog squad rushed to the court complex and carried out a comprehensive search of all court halls, offices, rooms, washrooms and the surrounding premises. No suspicious objects or explosive materials were found, following which the threat was declared a hoax.

Police have registered a case and launched an investigation to trace the sender of the threatening email.

Couple, daughter killed in bike-tractor collision near Mulbagal

MULBAGAL (KOLAR DISTRICT), DHNS: A couple and their 16-year-old daughter were killed in a head-on collision between a bike and a tractor at V Guttahalli in the taluk on Saturday evening.

The police have identified the deceased as Abubaker (38), his wife Sabeera (35) and their daughter Zoya, natives of N Chamakalahalli near Nangali.

The accident occurred when they were returning home on a bike after working at a quarry near Hosakote. Abubaker rammed his two-wheeler to the tractor coming in the opposite direction near V Guttahalli gate on NH 75. All three came under the tractor wheels and died at the spot.

The Mulbagal Rural police have registered a case.

IN LOVING MEMORY
3 NOVEMBER 1937
26 JUNE 2026
Dorothy Menezes
" Her love built more than a family and an institution, she built a lifetime of memories for countless people. We will miss you "
Cheryl & Antony D'souza, Natasha, Damien, Tanya, Ashton
Roshan & Sandhya Menezes, Tapan, Nithya, Tejal
30 JUNE 2026, TUESDAY
9:30 AM TO 11:00 AM
Viewing at
Carmel High School
Basaveshwaranagar
12 NOON TO 1:30 PM
Viewing at
Residence
Rajajinagar
3 PM
FUNERAL MASS
St. Patrick's Church, Residency Road
Followed by Burial
at St Patrick's Cemetery
Hosur Road, Gate 6
DIRECTIONS

'Wall of Gratitude' to honour those giving land ...

DKS, from Page 3

The announcement comes in the wake of the recent controversies over the acquisition of farmlands for the proposed integrated township in Bidadi.

Referring to the newly inaugurated 10-lane Major Arterial Road, now named after former chief minister S M Krishna, Shivakumar said the proposed 123-km Bengaluru Business Corridor would also feature a Wall of Gratitude, recognising those who gave up land for the project.

"Birth is accidental and death is certain. What matters is what achievement or sacrifice we make between birth and death. I offer my salutations to all those who sacrificed their land for this 10-lane road," the chief minister said.

He said the memorial would become a permanent acknowledgement of the contributions made by landowners towards Bengaluru's infrastructure and development. He also reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring fair rehabilitation for those affected by major infrastructure projects.

The CM also announced that the government has decided to establish a Kempegowda Study Centre attached to Bangalore University on 9.5 acres of land provided in Higher Education Minister K H Muniyappa's constituency of Devanahalli. Shivakumar also announced development works worth Rs 10 crore at Huthridurga to commemorate the Bengaluru founder's legacy.

Vertical growth

Highlighting the city's future growth, Shivakumar said Bengaluru could no longer continue expanding outwards. "The city cannot grow horizontally anymore. Bengaluru has to grow vertically. If we want to accommodate future generations while protecting land and improving infrastructure, vertical growth is the only way forward," he said.

◆ WEATHER ◆

Overview: Dry weather prevailed over Coastal Karnataka, South Interior Karnataka and North Interior Karnataka

Forecast June 28: Rainfall to occur at few places over the state.

INTERIOR NORTH			
Stations	Max	Min	Rain
Belagavi	30.6	20.2	00
Bidar	31.2	24	0.4
Vijayapura	32.5	21.8	10.6
Dharwad	31	20.4	00
Haveri	30.4	22	00
Kalaburagi	35.2	24.2	0.3
Raichur	34.4	24.4	00
COASTAL			
Honnavar	31.2	NA	6.6
Karwar	32.2	23.3	5.8
Shirali	NA	NA	NA
Mangaluru	31.6	23.2	19.9

INTERIOR SOUTH			
Stations	Max	Min	Rain
Agumbe	27.8	21.5	17
Bengaluru	30.7	21.3	00
Ballari	NA	NA	NA
Chamarajanagar	NA	NA	NA
Chikkamagaluru	NA	NA	NA
Chitradurga	30.8	22.1	0.5
Davangere	30	20.3	6.4
Hassan	NA	NA	NA
Mysuru	30.6	20	00
Madikeri	NA	NA	NA
Kolar	31.8	21.4	00
OTHER STATIONS			
New Delhi	41.5	30.8	00
Kolkata	35.1	27.8	00
Mumbai	33.6	25.9	0.5
Chennai	37.7	28.2	00
Pune	34.3	23.4	00
Hyderabad	31.2	26	00
Th'puram	30.8	24.6	1.3

Rajasthan maternal health crisis: Oppn, activists put govt on the mat

Maternal deaths, post-C-section complications have raised concerns

RAKHEE ROYTALUKDAR
JAIPUR

Following the cancellation of a Kota-based drug distributor's licence over the sale of allegedly spurious oxytocin injections that led to the death of five women soon after giving birth, the Union Health Ministry has asked for a detailed report from the Rajasthan government.

Additionally, the World Health Organisation has asked the Indian government to submit a pharmacovigilance report on the possible spread of spurious oxytocin across the country and the potential danger it poses to public health.

The recent maternal deaths and post-C-section complications in government hospitals in Rajasthan's Kota, Bikaner, and Jodhpur have raised concerns amongst health experts.

In May, at least five women died at Kota's New Medical College Hospital following C-sections, apparently due to uncontrolled bleeding and the use of fake oxytocin.

In June, at least two women died at Bikaner's PBM Government Hospital following C-Sections. A total of six women developed acute kidney infection after childbirth at the hospital.

A medical team identified several administrative lapses and unhygienic conditions — including irregular fumigation of the operation theatre (OT), widespread post-operative infection in wards, and the absence of a dedicated ICU for the gynaecological department — as the main reasons for the deaths.

Soon thereafter, a maternal health crisis erupted in Jodhpur on June 20: Eight women who underwent C-Section deliveries on the same morning developed complications at the Paota District Government Hospital.

Within hours of the surgery, six developed septicaemia, experienced abdominal pain, ran high fevers, and developed dangerously low blood pressure. The other two developed acute kidney infection, failed to pass urine, and suffered from severe postpartum bleeding.

Safety lapses

5 women died after C-sections in Kota

2 in Bikaner

8 women developed serious complications in Jodhpur

CDSCO probe found suspected spurious oxytocin lacking active ingredients

WHO has asked India for a pharmacovigilance report on the possible spread of spurious oxytocin

Subsequently, the state's Health Ministry initiated a multi-level enquiry, paused operations across affected OTs, and began testing batches of IV fluids and drugs.

Preliminary findings pointed to institutional and administrative lapses. Authorities took departmental action against the responsible medical staff at the affected hospitals.

State-level investigations and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) pointed to suspected spurious oxytocin, which lacked the active and necessary pharmaceutical ingredients.

Spurious oxytocin vials and several other irregularities were detected at the Rajasthan Medical Hall following an inspection. It was alleged that the firm bought 9,300 units of Tocin 1-ml injections from Amritsar-based pharmaceutical company Jackson Laboratories, which sold fake oxytocin vials. However, the authorities found that Rajasthan Medical Hall sold 10,050 units from the same batch.

Replying to a show-cause notice, the firm replied that an additional 750 vials had been dispatched later by bus.

A joint raid by the CDSCO and the Punjab State Drug Regulator at Amritsar's Jackson Laboratories found that tap water had been used in the vials. The investigation also revealed that the firm performed no internal quality checks on the finished batches, and that it had been blacklisted in at least five states: Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu.

Jackson Laboratories' and Rajasthan Medical Hall's licences were cancelled on June 22 and June 23, respectively. Jackson Laboratories' secondary manufacturing unit in Himachal Pradesh was also ordered shut.

Meanwhile, Rajasthan Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar's statement — that critically-ill pregnant women had been admitted at PBM Hospital, and that they "did not come dancing and singing" — sparked a political row, with the Opposition targeting the BJP government over the remarks.

Congress leader and former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot said: "The health minister should take this matter seriously. The government should do something to reassure women who are now afraid to go to hospitals. When our government was in power, we had 90% institutional deliveries, but now there are reports of infection and substandard medicines."

Meanwhile, NGO Jan Swasthya Abhiyan has urged the government to conduct a high-level, independent, and time-bound judicial inquiry into the incidents, besides the registration of FIRs against the errants and an urgent need for comprehensive reforms.

Cong reshuffle: Manickam Tagore is TN unit chief

B Manickam Tagore

CHENNAI, DHNS: With political equations in the state shifting to the TVK from the DMK, the Congress on Saturday appointed its whip in Lok Sabha, B Manickam Tagore, as the chief of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC), ushering in a generational change in the state leadership.

Tagore (51), a three-time Lok Sabha member from Virudhunagar, replaces K Selvaperunthagai, who has been requesting the high command to relieve him of his responsibilities since the April 23 Assembly elections.

Tagore's appointment is a clear indication that the Congress wants to completely move away from the DMK in Tamil Nadu and get closer to the ruling TVK.

The party is already part of the TVK government and has announced it will contest the local body and the 2029 Lok Sabha polls in an alliance with the Vijay-led party. Tagore is a vocal critic of the DMK and one of the key persons who pushed for a share in power ahead of the elections, which created a rift between the two parties.

"Things are now clear. The Congress wants to focus on its future in Tamil Nadu, and that's why it has appointed a person who is anti-DMK and pro-TVK. Tagore will now prepare the party for the local body polls. He will have to negotiate a decent seat-sharing arrangement with the TVK for the local body polls," a senior Congress leader told *DH*.

The Congress believes it has space to grow in TN with the defeat of the DMK and the AIADMK in the Assembly elections.

Telangana may consult non-BJP states on VB-G RAM G

S N V SUDHIR
HYDERABAD, DHNS

The Telangana government has decided to consult non-BJP states like Karnataka and Kerala before adopting the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM(G).

The state Cabinet Sub-committee examining the Centre's proposed legislation to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) proposed consultations with chief ministers of Karnataka and Kerala to assess whether the two states would be willing to pursue a common legal strategy or other coordinated measures to protect the powers and financial interests of the states.

It also discussed extensively whether Telangana should challenge the legislation in the Supreme Court.

The sub-committee met on Saturday for the second time in less than a week. There are concerns about the proposed central legislation, which threatens to weaken the federal structure by reducing the role of states in implementing the rural employment programme. It felt that the law's wider implications had not yet been adequately communicated to the public.

A mahout guides a greater one-horned rhinoceros through floodwaters back to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary after it strayed out in search of food in Assam's Morigaon district on Saturday. PTI

Now, teacher eligibility test on hold over 'paper leak'

Oppn slams BJP; Fadnavis orders SIT probe

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

Even as the NEET-UG paper leak continues to dominate national politics and students' problems, the Maharashtra government postponed Sunday's Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) after authorities uncovered evidence of a suspected question paper leak.

The incident seems to have taken place in the Thane district, and at least three persons have been arrested by Saturday night, reports said.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has announced a probe by the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is considering invoking the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, in a post on X, slammed the BJP-led governments at the Centre and in Maharashtra. "Another paper leak. Another exam cancelled. This time, Maharashtra's TET. The country's education and examination system has been turned into a system of extortion, leaving every youth in the country insecure. This is not just a paper leak, it is the theft of the youth's future," he said.

After the suspected leak, the Maharashtra State Council of Examination cancelled Sunday's paper scheduled to be held simultaneously at 1,028 centres, saying that the new date will be announced early next week.

The police have arrested three alleged suspects — Rajiv Shah (45) and Akash Kumar (30), both from Bihar's Patna and Dheeraj Kumar (28) of Panipat, Haryana.

AADITYA THACKERAY
Sena (UBT) leader

"Should young men and women have to spend every year protesting? When will the youth of our country get the chance to dream about and build their future?

Paper sold for Rs 1.5 cr

Additional Commissioner of Police Ashok Dudhe said that the question paper was allegedly being 'sold' for a staggering Rs 1.50 crore, indicating a well-organised racket transcending the state border. Police have sent multiple teams to other states to trace the source of the leak, officials said.

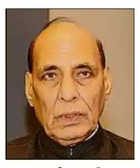
CJP hits out

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke slammed the government. "The TET paper leak in Maharashtra has once again made it clear that the BJP government is incapable of conducting any examination in a proper manner. Their focus is solely on political manoeuvers, centred on splitting parties and buying out MLAs and MPs," he said.

"The government is not bothered. They are busy with breaking political parties. The so-called double-engine regime is to be blamed for the 'double-leaks' in such a short time," he added.

Govt hits back at 'false' claims on Rajnath's Op Sindoor speech

NEW DELHI, PTI: The government on Saturday said some social media posts sought to "misrepresent" Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's address in Parliament in July 2025 and "selectively" quoted an isolated portion of it to "falsely imply" that he had claimed that "no Indian soldier lost his life during Operation Sindoor".



Rajnath Singh

"These are deliberately misleading and factually incorrect," the defence ministry said, adding that the minister's remarks were in reference to the "specific and mischievous narrative" that India had lost its pilots during Operation Sindoor.

The statement from the ministry comes after Congress leader Pawan Khera accused the government of "concealing" the supreme sacrifice made by six bravehearts during the operation.

In a statement, the defence ministry said that ...those who have sought to "construct a controversy" out of the defence minister's Parliamentary address have done so by "deliberately ignoring the full context of his remarks."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie during the handing-over ceremony of a fast patrol vessel with cars and ambulances at the Coast Guard Base in Victoria, Seychelles. PTI

PM hails India-Seychelles ties as 'steady, strong & long-lasting'

VICTORIA (SEYCHELLES), PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday described the India-Seychelles friendship as "steady, strong and long-lasting" and said the two countries would "together win the race" as he addressed a state dinner hosted by the archipelagic nation's President Patrick Herminie.

Modi arrived in Seychelles earlier in the day on a three-day official visit, during which he will attend the golden jubilee celebrations of the National Day of Seychelles as the Guest of Honour and hold talks with President Herminie.

"The friendship between India and Seychelles has progressed steady, strong and long-lasting, and together we will win the race," Modi said at the state dinner, according to a statement by Seychelles' Office of the President.

Addressing the dinner, President Herminie affirmed the enduring bond between the two nations.

"India has been a steadfast friend to Seychelles, a sentiment warmly reciprocated by our people and our vibrant Indian diaspora," he said.

Earlier, Modi handed over a 'Made in India' fast patrol vessel to the Seychelles' coast guard, reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to strengthening the nation's maritime security capabilities.

"The transfer of the Fast Patrol Vessel Lespwar to the Seychelles Coast Guard marks another important milestone in the growing India-Seychelles partnership in defence and maritime security," Modi posted on X.

He further said, "It is also the latest in a series of capability-building initiatives that reflect India's steadfast commitment to supporting the security priorities of Seychelles."

Upon arrival at the Seychelles International Airport, Modi was given a grand welcome by Herminie and a high-level delegation.

T'gana student found dead in London

HYDERABAD, PTI: A 25-year-old student from the Kamareddy district of Telangana, who was pursuing higher studies in London, was found dead, his family members said on Saturday.

S Srinath Reddy had gone to London 14 months ago, his father Madhusudan Reddy told reporters at Talamadla village in the district.

He said the circumstances surrounding his son's death are not known and appealed to the central and state governments to help expedite the repatriation of the body.

Madhusudan Reddy also said his son had spoken to the family members on the night of June 22, and the conversation was normal.

According to him, Srinath Reddy had reportedly attended a birthday party on the night of June 22.

A family relative, whose son also resides in London, said a roommate of Srinath Reddy had found him dead on the morning of June 23.

The roommate said Srinath Reddy had allegedly hung himself.

The roommate informed other friends about the death only later, the family relative said.

Delhi, U'khand on alert over 'Khalistani terror threat'

NEW DELHI, PTI: Intelligence agencies have issued a security alert for Delhi and Uttarakhand following a possible Khalistani terror threat, with key religious sites, government establishments and police installations put under heightened surveillance, sources said on Saturday.

According to sources in the intelligence establishment, the alert was triggered after an email surfaced warning of possible attacks in the coming days.

This threat comes against the backdrop of a standoff at the Nagrasu gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district between a group of Nihangs and the authorities. The Nihangs were demanding the release of four of their members arrested in connection with a clash with locals in Karnaprayag market on June 16.

NSG personnel during a mock drill, outside Israeli Embassy, in New Delhi, on Saturday. PTI

The standoff ended after three days on June 23, following the intervention of a Sikh delegation.

Later, on the night of June 25, a group of Nihang Sikhs forcibly entered Uttarakhand through the Kulhal border in the Dehradun district, which adjoins Himachal Pradesh, demanding the release of the arrested men. Officials managed to persuade them to return to Paonta Sahib.

The email allegedly mentioned several temples in Delhi and Uttarakhand, along with government offices, railway stations and police establishments, as potential targets.

The threat communication also reportedly referred to certain political leaders, raising concerns among security agencies, they said.

Following the alert, Delhi Police, Uttarakhand Police and central intelligence agencies have stepped up vigil and begun reviewing security arrangements at sensitive and high-footfall locations as a precautionary measure.

Officials said deployment has been increased at key religious places, transport hubs and government buildings, while local police units have been directed to remain alert and intensify patrolling.

Sources said Delhi Police has launched a probe into the email to ascertain its authenticity and trace its origin.

No specific input on the timing or exact location of a possible attack has emerged so far, officials said.

1 killed after unexploded shell goes off in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, DHNS: A civilian was killed, and several others were injured after an old unexploded shell detonated in the Gulmarg sector of north Kashmir's Baramulla district on Saturday, highlighting the continuing threat posed by unexploded ordnance in areas along the Line of Control (LoC).

The deceased was identified as Zabir Ahmad Bajad, a resident of the Chandoosa area of Baramulla.

The explosion occurred near Sumlowali Dok, close to Asha Post in the Gulmarg sector, officials said. The injured were shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment.

Authorities have launched an investigation to ascertain the cause of the explosion.

According to a senior police officer, the blast occurred when the victim allegedly handled an old unexploded shell.

Officials have yet to confirm the exact nature of the explosive device or the circumstances that led to the explosion.

The incident has once again brought into focus the risks posed by unexploded ordnance in J&K's border areas.

Decades of artillery and mortar exchanges along the Line of Control have left behind shells that failed to explode on impact.

Experts say such munitions can remain live for years and may detonate if disturbed by civilians or grazing livestock.

SPACE RACE

India mastered cryogenic engine technology once denied to it: Isro

BENGALURU, PTI

India has mastered the cryogenic engine technology once denied to it, Isro Chairman V Narayanan said on Saturday.

He said the country is preparing for the first uncrewed Gaganyaan mission, advancing Chandrayaan-4, a lunar sample return mission, and Chandrayaan-5, a joint long-duration mission with Japan involving a heavier rover.

Delivering the 17th Air Chief Marshal L M Katre Memorial Lecture at the HAL Management Academy under the aegis of the Air Force Association, Karnataka Branch, Narayanan outlined India's progress in space technology and its roadmap towards establishing an Indian space station by 2035 and landing an Indian astronaut on the Moon by 2040.

"We have developed a cryogenic rocket engine, the technology which was denied to India," Narayanan said.

He explained that India had transformed technology denial into technological leadership by developing three cryogenic propulsion systems and setting multiple world records in the process.

Current focus

Narayanan said the first uncrewed Gaganyaan mission was the immediate focus before India proceeds with crewed spaceflight. "We are now working on the first uncrewed mission this year. Then once we review the result, we'll come back to the crewed mission," he said during the lecture.

He said Chandrayaan-4 would be India's first lunar sample return mission, while Chandrayaan-5, to be undertaken jointly with Japan, would deploy a 350-kg rover capable of operating for nearly 100 days, compared with Chandrayaan-3's 25-kg rover and 14-day operational life.

'Votebank politics': BJP targets Sonia over 'silence' on Gaza criticism

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Congress Parliamentary Party chief Sonia Gandhi came under attack from the BJP on Saturday over her criticism of the Central government's stance on Gaza, with the latter accusing the Congress of practising "votebank politics" even on foreign policy matters.

The BJP response came after Sonia, in an opinion piece, criticised the Narendra Modi government for its "silence" on Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

Talking to reporters, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla accused the Congress of selectively raising international issues while ignoring Hindus' plight in neighbouring Bangladesh.

"Sonia Gandhi speaks up for the Muslims in Gaza, they tweet about Rafa, but they are silent on Hindus in Dhaka. This shows that for them, even foreign policy is calculated on the table, on the calculus of votebank," he said.

SUDHANSHU TRIVEDI
BJP national spokesperson

"After the INDIA bloc has reached the point of becoming irrelevant, the first and last chairperson of the now-defunct UPA alliance, Sonia Gandhi, has once again turned to the politics of radical votes by expressing grief over Gaza.

He also accused the Congress of trying to mislead people about India's position on Gaza and ignoring the government's diplomatic and humanitarian efforts there.

The BJP maintained that India had consistently called for peace, humanitarian assistance, and the protection of civilians.

The ruling party also accused the Congress of putting electoral considerations above national interest and diplomacy, saying its criticism of the government's foreign policy was politically motivated.

The remark is the latest flashpoint between the BJP and the Congress over India's position on the Israel-Gaza conflict, with the Opposition questioning the government's approach and the BJP countering that the Congress was engaging in selective outrage.

POLITICAL HEADWINDS Calls for Punjab CM's resignation grow louder

As Mann faces sacrilege row, Opposition goes for kill

GAUTAM DHEER

Religious decrees, chiefly the ones proclaimed by the highest seat of the Sikhs, often intertwine with politics in Punjab, whipping up passions that sway election outcomes. As the tumult surrounding serious allegations of sacrilege involving Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann grows, the chorus for his resignation only gets louder and shriller.

Across Sikh shrines, including the revered Golden Temple in Amritsar, hoardings underpinning the recent edict issued by the Akal Takht declared Mann a "Guru dokhi" (anti-Guru) and "Khalsa Panth Virodhi" (anti-community) galore. The Sikh clergymen's call appeals to the community to boycott Mann.

Given the matter's volatility, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) — which is in power in Punjab — faces its biggest challenge ahead of Assembly elections slated for early next year.

After all, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal only recently announced Mann as the party's chief-ministerial face for the upcoming state polls.

The AAP is already licking its wounds after seven of its Rajya Sabha members — led by Raghav Chadha — joined the BJP just a few months ago.

Mann has unequivocally denied appearing in the video clip, where someone, apparently in an inebriated state, appears to be desecrating images of the sacred Gurus in a hotel room in Canada.

"The man in the clip is clearly wearing a (silicon) mask. He does not have a scar on his neck, which I have had since childhood," he said.

Merits apart, Mann, for now, seems to have widely lost the quintessential perception of probity that remains customary to govern.

Opposition parties — the Congress, Akali Dal, and the BJP — are seeking an FIR against Mann, even as the clamour for his removal from the CM's post grows louder by the minute.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is at the centre of a row that sees him accused of sacrilege, less than year ahead of the Assembly polls. PTI FILE

Controversy and twist

It was in October 2025 that a video clip of a person resembling Mann was released on social media by a Canada-based individual named Jagman Samra. The clip showed the person in it disrespecting images of Sikh gurus placed inside a hotel room.

On June 15 this year, the Sikh clergy at the Akal Takht saw reasons to believe the authenticity of the clip and declared Mann guilty of religious misconduct. Three days later, the AAP announced that forensic tests by two independent laboratories found no similarity between the person in the video clip and Mann.

Mann and his party were left flummoxed when the Gurugram Police in neighbouring Haryana — a BJP-ruled state — made startling revelations. While arresting a few persons, including forensic digital experts, in connection with the Mann episode, the cops said the accused were paid to arrange a fabricated forensic report favouring Mann.

So, how did it all happen? Alarmingly, two senior Punjab Police officers met the accused at the five-star Hotel Crowne Plaza in Gurugram. One among those present was forensic digital expert Jaspreet Jassi, who is now the complainant in this case.

A deal was struck, allegedly to fabricate the report in Mann's favour. Unverified CCTV footage and WhatsApp chats have also surfaced.

Changing political matrix

A restive street awaits the AAP amid major headwinds ahead of the Punjab Assembly polls.

The opposition is loading itself with ample fodder — from deteriorating law and order, drug abuse, sacrilege, farmers' unrest, to fiscal strain — to take down Mann and the AAP.

The AAP, which romped to victory in 2022 with 92 of the 117 Assembly seats in the state, played the crucial Panthak (religious) card in the election year by enacting the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026, which incorporated stringent penalties for sacrilege.

The objective was two-fold. The AAP, against the backdrop of the SAD leadership being held guilty of religious misconduct by the Akal Takht, wanted to institute its religious credentials by appealing to a larger devout audience in Punjab and elsewhere.

By promulgating an Act that promised tougher action against religious wrongdoers, Mann also hoped to garner some political advantage in the SAD's credibility loss. The SAD has long claimed guardianship over the Panthak issues. It's now turned on its head, with Mann himself in the dock over alleged sacrilege.

What lies ahead?

Punjab has always manifested a contrarian streak that blunts the Narendra Modi juggernaut. The saffron outfit now sees hope in an alliance with the SAD, which has always been its recipe whenever it shared power in Punjab. The alliance, so far denied by both outfits, could also benefit the beleaguered SAD.

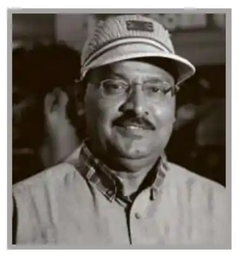
The Congress suffers from internal sabotage and strife. At a recent meeting, Rahul Gandhi warned party leaders, advising them to put their acts together.

The AAP's predicament, accentuated by the sacrilege controversy, is unlikely to ebb anytime soon. Opposition parties know it's time to go for the kill.

(*The author is a Chandigarh-based senior journalist*)

The man who taught an entire generation to tell stories

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS



K Bhagyaraj
(1953-2026)

Legendary filmmaker-actor K Bhagyaraj, who passed away due to a heart attack here on Saturday at the age of 73, changed the course of Tamil cinema through his brilliant screenplay and dialogue-writing.

One of the biggest achievements of Bhagyaraj — who tried his hand at everything, from acting to directing to producing to scoring music for films — was dominating Tamil filmdom in the 1980s when it was already ruled by icons such as Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth.

Born in Vellankoil in the Erode district, Bhagyaraj dropped out of college due to financial constraints and worked various odd jobs. He began his film career as a writer and character artist, but became one of the most popular stars of the 1980s.

Bhagyaraj's humour and wit were as legendary as his scripts, which always carried a human touch. The "King of Screenplay" was an accomplished writer and edited the weekly magazine 'Bhagya' for a long time. He also dabbled in politics, but he couldn't replicate his cinematic success there.

His first seven films as director and actor were blockbusters. He even delivered four super-duper hits in a single year. Bhagyaraj was also an inspiration to a generation of filmmakers who ventured into acting after directing movies — be it his assistant R Pandiarajan, or Cheran, or R Parthiban.

His screenplay-writing skills so impressed Bollywood icon Rajesh Khanna that the actor starred in 'Masterji', a Hindi remake of the Tamil cult classic 'Mudhanai Mudichu'.

He was particularly known for double entendres in his films, which drew both commendation and condemnation. However, most of his directorial ventures focused on social themes and relatable middle-class and rural family issues.

"He would narrate the story in a gripping manner for hours... It is only after listening to Bhagyaraj that I began composing music for debutant directors," said legendary composer Ilaiyaraaja.

"He never believed in making money for himself. If he did, he would have bought multiple properties in Chennai. He is a good soul," Rajinikanth once said of Bhagyaraj.

He is survived by his wife Poornima, son Shanthanu (both actors) and daughter Saranya.

Ram temple Trust confirms Rai's exit

Trust assures devotees on donations

LUCKNOW, DHNS

General secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust Champat Rai (left) and member Anil Mishra. PTI

Setting at rest all speculation, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on Saturday said its general secretary, Champat Rai, has tendered his resignation, while appealing to people not to fall prey to "misleading and baseless" rumours.

Expressing regret over reports of alleged embezzlement of devotees' offerings, the Trust assured stern punishment for the guilty.

A statement issued by treasurer Govind Dev Giri said that another member, Anil Mishra, has also resigned from the temple body. He also said that the trust would "consider" their resignations in its next meeting, but did not specify when it would take place.

In an apparent bid to allay apprehensions of those who had sought information about their donations, Giri said that the jewellery, silver bricks and other items handed over to the trust office bearers by the donors for being offered at the Ram temple were "safe" and "accounted for".

"We assure everyone that we will ensure that such unfortunate situations do not arise in future. We demand that those guilty get a stringent punishment. We will not allow attempts by anti-social, anti-religious and selfish elements to tarnish the image of Sanatan Dharm to succeed," Giri said.

Several people had come forward after reports of alleged 'embezzlement' and complained that they were not provided with any receipts for the jewellery, silver bricks and other valuable items donated.

Giri said that an FIR has already been registered on the recommendation of the SIT and that legal proceedings were on. He assured that the trust would ensure that such incidents do not recur in future. "We will not allow efforts by the anti-social, irreligious and selfish elements to tarnish the image of Sanatana Dharma to succeed," Giri said.

Champat Rai, a former chemistry teacher in Dhampur, has long been associated with the RSS. He joined the VHP in 1980 and worked closely with former VHP chief Ashok Singhal. Following the Supreme Court's verdict in the Ram Janmabhoomi title dispute, he was appointed as a member of the trust.

He also served as the master of ceremonies during the consecration of the Ram Temple in January 2024, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.

Anil Mishra is also associated with the RSS and is a resident of Ayodhya. A homeopathic doctor by profession, he has been involved in the Ram Temple movement since the 1990s. During the consecration ceremony, Mishra and his wife, Usha, served as the yajman (chief hosts) for the rituals.

Congress questions PM's silence on donation 'theft'

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Congress on Saturday ratcheted up its attack on the ruling BJP over the theft of donations from the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "silence" and demanding the disbandment of the temple Trust and the arrest of trustees, including Champat Rai.

Party leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Digvijaya Singh and Akhilesh Pratap Singh separately raised the issue during the day, even as the Uttar Pradesh Police arrested eight people accused of embezzling donations at the Ram temple.

Priyanka said that it was "really tragic" that people from all over the country, those who believe and those who have faith, gave donations, and now those donations have been stolen.

"It is shameful, and the government needs to enquire into what...how...why it has happened...Women have given from their savings...poor people have given. It is not just funds that have been given by corporates. These are funds collected from every citizen, and there was a drive to collect them. So, who is responsible? If you collect them, it is your responsibility," she said in Wayanad.

AKHILESH PRASAD SINGH
Congress spokesperson

"The country wants to know why Prime Minister Narendra Modi is silent on such a big issue... Prime Minister Narendra Modi should step forward to ensure a fair investigation of this case, so that people's faith remains intact.

At a press conference in Delhi, Akhilesh Pratap Singh asked why the prime minister was silent over allegations levelled against Trust members who were appointed by his government and demanded that all those who have prima facie been found to be involved must be arrested to facilitate an impartial investigation.

"When serious allegations are being raised against people who were given this responsibility, why is the PM silent right now?" he said while claiming that allegations of corruption had surfaced even during the construction of the temple regarding people close to the ruling dispensation buying land there.

"The Trust managing the Ram Temple has lost the trust of the people, and it must be disbanded," he said.

Senior leader Digvijaya Singh demanded the arrest of Champat Rai, general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, claiming that the BJP, RSS, and VHP "bear full responsibility for this episode, but they are trying to shield the accused".

"The entire accountability and responsibility for this lies with the BJP, RSS, and VHP," PTI quoted him as saying in Ujjain.

SIR to begin in Karnataka, 4 other states from Tuesday

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The contentious Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls will kickstart in five states, including Karnataka, covering around 19.78 crore voters from Tuesday.

The house-to-house enumeration will begin in Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi besides Karnataka on June 30. Already, the SIR exercise, which is in its third phase, has started in 12 other states in the past one month.

In the five states where the exercise starts on Tuesday, the final rolls will be published on October 10. The house-to-house enumeration will end on July 29 and the draft rolls will be published on August 5.

Voters and others are given a month's time from August 5 to file claims and objections while those will be disposed of by October 3.

Among the five states going to SIR, Maharashtra has the highest number of 9.86 crore voters as on May 12 followed by Karnataka (5.55 crore), Jharkhand (2.64 crore), Delhi (1.48 crore) and Meghalaya (23.43 lakh).

New BJP team to counter SP's backward-minorities formula

SANJAY PANDEY
LUCKNOW, DHNS

By including 30 members from the 'non-Yadav' OBC community and six members from the Dalit community in its newly formed state executive, the BJP has clearly indicated that it is not ready to take any chance and will go all out to 'counter' the PDA (Pichda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) formula of arch-rival Samajwadi Party (SP) in the 2027 Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh.

Non-Yadav OBC members form around 60% of the list of the 64-member executive committee of the state, which will have 19 vice-presidents, eight general secretaries and 19 secretaries. It also has six regional presidents, six presidents of the party's various cells and three office secretaries. The new committee has 27 members from the general categories.

A journalist from Hathras district, Yatendra Sharma, has also made it to the new executive committee.

The BJP had suffered a serious setback in the state in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and its tally of seats declined from 64 in the 2019 LS elections to 33, while the SP, riding high on its PDA formula, emerged victorious in 37 seats.

It was believed that a large chunk of OBC and Dalit community members supported the SP in the LS polls in 2024.

That the party was serious in looking to counter the PDA formula of the SP could be gauged from the fact all three senior organisational posts in the Kashi region had been given to members of the OBC community. "This has happened for the first time," said a local BJP leader.

"Though ours is a party for all sections of society, the focus will be on the non-Yadav OBC and non-Jatav Dalits in the Assembly polls," a senior state BJP leader told *DH* here on Saturday.

The SP has already launched a campaign to consolidate its support base among the 'non-Yadav' OBC, and it will be interesting to see if the OBC-dominated new BJP team is able to 'counter' the SP's PDA formula in the polls.

SEEDS OF REVIVAL

GI-tagged Onattukara sesame reshaping Kerala's fields

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

Onattukara, a region spanning Alappuzha and Kollam districts in south Kerala, is witnessing a revival of sesame cultivation.

The effort has gained fresh momentum with GI-tagged Onattukara sesame being included in the National Mission on Edible Oils-Oil Seeds (NMEO-OS), aimed at reducing India's reliance on imported edible oils and oilseeds.

A sesame field in Kerala. DH PHOTO

Joint initiatives by the state agriculture department and Kerala Agricultural University in recent years have driven this revival. Cultivation takes place in both upland and wetland areas, requires less water, and is ideally carried out between September and April. The yield is expected in 90 days.

Around 1,500 farmers in the region are now engaged in sesame cultivation. They receive training and support from the state government and local panchayats. At present, sesame is grown on about 600 hectares in Onattukara, with the national mission setting a target of expanding this to 1,000 hectares.

Following the successful launch of sesame oil, the Onattukara Vikasana Agency (OVA), a Kerala government initiative, is in the final stages of introducing nutrition supplement tablets and biscuits made from this oil. Toxicology studies and dosage assessments were carried out by the Jubilee Mission Centre for Medical Research.

The GI tag awarded to Onattukara sesame in 2022, along with a minimum support price of Rs 300-Rs 350 per kilogram, gave a major boost to cultivation in the region, says OVA chief development officer Binesh VR.

Binesh added that the NMEO-OS would further strengthen the effort by ensuring quality seed supply and proper training for farmers.

So far, the OVA has produced about 4,250 litres of sesame oil, procuring seeds directly from farmers. The product is in strong demand, driven largely by word-of-mouth publicity, he said.

Compared to sesame grown in other parts of the country, Onattukara sesame has a higher content of proteins, amino acids, minerals, antioxidants such as sesamin and sesamolin, and Omega-3 fatty acids. Scientific studies have also confirmed its detoxification qualities and muscle-strengthening properties.

Low cultivation cost, minimal water and labour requirements make sesame farming in the region highly viable.

Vaiko severs ties with DMK alliance, hints at support to TVK

CHENNAI, DHNS: Vaiko's Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) on Saturday quit the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance — in the first step towards moving closer to the ruling Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK).

However, the party's two MLAs — Rajendran and Senthil Selvan — will continue to be members of DMK in the Tamil Nadu Assembly since they were elected on the party's 'Rising Sun' symbol.

Vaiko

The decision — which was reported by *DH* on June 18 — was announced by Vaiko after a meeting of the party's highest decision-making body.

MDMK joined the DMK alliance in 2017 and contested four elections from 2019 to 2026. The party has been expressing displeasure over DMK disallowing MDMK to contest on an independent symbol. Vaiko also blamed DMK's willingness to support AIADMK to form the next government in the state. "MDMK cannot support any decision that allows the Hindutva forces to take root in Tamil Nadu," he said.

Though Vaiko rejected the possibility of MDMK joining any alliance — saying it would be decided before the next elections — he hinted at extending support to the TVK government and Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay.

Another significant statement that Vaiko made on Saturday was that the chief minister had asked him to direct his two MLAs to resign and contest the by-elections. "He said it was his duty to get them re-elected after resignation. The CM also offered to campaign for the candidates in the by elections. I said they won't resign," Vaiko added.

This statement triggered a major political row with DMK and other opposition parties saying the CM's offer was a clear case of horse trading.

With MDMK quitting the alliance, DMK is left with a couple of smaller parties, including the late Vijayakanth's DMDK.

Man held after Mumbai cops foil Muharram poisoning plot

MUMBAI, DHNS: The Mumbai Police claim to have busted an alleged plot to target Friday's Muharram procession in Mumbai with the arrest of a Pune-based man and the seizure of 14,900 capsules containing zinc phosphide, the main compound in rat poison.

The suspect was identified as Faiyaz Premji (39), a resident of Pune's Viman Nagar.

According to initial reports, he operates a paint business and had recently been staying in guest accommodations in Mumbai's Dongri area.

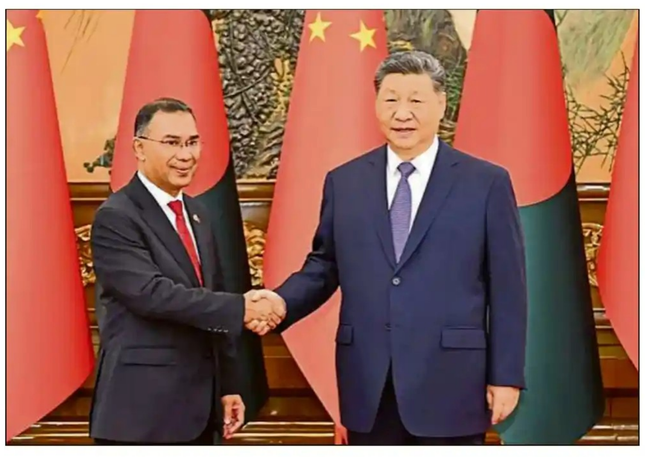
The procession he reportedly targeted was scheduled to pass through the JJ Hospital and Byculla area of Mumbai. Investigations are currently underway to determine the motive behind the act and whether others were involved.

BALANCING ACT Trip underscores growing shift towards Beijing amid complex India ties

Rahman's China visit signals B'desh economic priorities

SREERADHA DATTA

Putting to rest speculation, newly elected Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman began his international engagements with visits to Malaysia and China. India or China has traditionally been the preferred destination for most Bangladeshi leaders' first foreign trip. Rahman's choice also carries symbolic significance, continuing the legacy of his father, Ziaur Rahman, the first Bangladeshi leader to visit China.



Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY

Bangladesh has long enjoyed strong political ties with both Malaysia and China. Given current global economic conditions and Bangladesh's challenges, Dhaka's priority was to boost trade and investment, deepen economic cooperation and explore employment opportunities for Bangladeshis. With Malaysia, the joint communiqué outlined cooperation in trade, investment, technology and labour. In China, the two sides signed 17 MoUs covering trade, investment, infrastructure, connectivity and development, including agreements between the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority and Chinese business organisations, as well as between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Communist Party of China.

It is still too early to assess the impact of Rahman's "Invest Bangladesh" initiative, but China has become one of Bangladesh's largest investors, with nearly US$8 billion invested by 2024. According to the World Bank, China is also Bangladesh's largest creditor, with an estimated exposure of US$6.2 billion. Unlike some South Asian countries, however, Bangladesh has avoided a debt-servicing trap.

Bangladesh's infrastructure transformation over recent decades bears a significant Chinese imprint. The eight Friendship Bridges have improved connectivity across the country. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China has undertaken projects including the Karnaphuli River Tunnel. Dhaka has also joined the Global Development Initiative, expanding cooperation into energy, climate resilience and disaster preparedness.

Although the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone in Chittagong made limited progress over the past decade, prospects appear brighter, with nearly 30 Chinese companies expressing interest. As China seeks alternative production locations amid rising costs elsewhere, the zone could gain renewed momentum.

The two sides also highlighted the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh Economic Corridor, aimed at connecting China's Yunnan province. The initiative echoes the BCIM regional framework, from which India eventually withdrew. However, the proposed Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project did not feature prominently. Bangladesh has long hoped China would support the project, but its proximity to India's border has generated concerns in New Delhi. Practical challenges have also slowed progress, as the Teesta's heavy sediment load and seasonal flow variations make restoration both technically difficult and costly. As a lower riparian state, Bangladesh has expressed concern over Chinese dam and hydropower projects on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo) in Tibet.

Regional geopolitical realities have also strengthened Bangladesh-China cooperation. Following Bangladesh's political crisis in August 2024, Beijing provided support, particularly in healthcare, at a time when India had stepped back. Healthcare has since become a more prominent area of cooperation, including plans for the Bangladesh-China Friendship General Hospital in Rangpur.

Frequent references to the "One China Policy" underline the importance Dhaka places on relations with Beijing. Yet differences remain. China's limited support on the Rohingya issue, trade imbalances, restricted access for Bangladeshi goods to Chinese markets and project delays continue to generate friction. Even so, the relationship has become increasingly broad-based and strategic. The absence of historical baggage has helped. Bangladeshi political parties, regardless of ideology, are generally comfortable being seen as pro-China, unlike in their dealings with India.

Rahman appears to have struck the right notes during his debut foreign tours. The Bangladesh-China joint communiqué's assertion that "No matter how the world changes, China will always be a trustworthy good friend, good neighbour and good partner of Bangladesh" reflects the depth of the relationship. Both countries clearly recognise each other's importance. The real test, however, will be how they navigate emerging geopolitical and economic uncertainties together.

(The writer is a professor at the Jindal School of International Affairs, O P Jindal Global University, Haryana.)

Ties with Beijing at highest level after PM's visit: Foreign minister

The relations between Dhaka and Beijing have reached their "highest level" after Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit to China, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said on Saturday, PTI reports from Dhaka. Addressing a press conference a day after PM Rahman returned from Beijing, he said, "This is the highest step in terms of China's bilateral engagement."

The foreign minister said the visit yielded a "landmark upgrade" in bilateral ties reflecting Bangladesh's "growing strategic importance" in China's regional diplomacy. The minister said Bangladesh and China agreed to institutionalise a "strategic dialogue" at the foreign minister-level and introduce a "2+2" dialogue mechanism covering diplomacy and defence.

Indian among those sanctioned by US over Sudan conflict

WASHINGTON, PTI: The US has imposed sanctions on eight individuals and entities, including an Indian national associated with an explosives manufacturing firm, for allegedly fuelling the civil war in Sudan.

The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said on Friday that the targeted networks enabled both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces to expand and intensify the civil war in the African nation. Among the sanctioned individuals is Alok Choudhari of Raipur, the CEO of SBL Energy Limited, also known as Amin Explosive Private Ltd, which allegedly supplied more than 200 shipments of explosives and explosive-related materials to a company that maintained the SAF's arsenal. The Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on SBL Energy Ltd and other firms based in Sudan and Egypt.

"These networks supply weapons, explosives, and foreign fighters to both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. Their support has prolonged a conflict that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis and provided space for terrorist groups to operate," Tommy Pigott, spokesperson for the US Department of State, said in a statement.

Despair grows in Venezuela as quake toll hits 1,430

Foreign teams join search efforts as thousands remain missing

LA GUAIRA/CARACAS (VENEZUELA), REUTERS

Rescue workers search through the rubble three days after earthquakes struck Catia La Mar area on Saturday. AP/PTI

The death toll from Venezuela's earthquakes rose to 1,430 on Saturday, officials said.

The latest figures were released as rescuers continued searching for survivors of the double blow of magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 earthquakes that devastated the South American nation three days earlier. Families had reported at least 68,900 people missing as of Saturday morning.

Venezuelans searching for loved ones and neighbours used shovels, heavy equipment, ropes and their bare hands atop mounds of collapsed concrete throughout La Guaira, one of the country's hardest-hit states.

Most of those digging were civilians who had taken search efforts into their own hands, and tensions grew over what many viewed as an inadequate government response. Soldiers, firefighters, police officers and military cadets appeared underprepared to deal with the scale of the disaster. Venezuela's government said on Saturday that 1,600 members of foreign rescue teams had arrived to help search for survivors as access to the worst-affected areas was tightened.

Residents and volunteers in La Guaira, a popular beach destination where at least 100 buildings, many of them residential high-rises, were destroyed or damaged, have for days complained of shortages of heavy equipment and a limited official presence.

Venezuela's Interim President Delcy Rodriguez said in an overnight address on state television that 10 more countries were still expected to join rescue efforts and that 14,000 military and police personnel were in La Guaira to patrol and undertake sanitary measures. "In recent hours, Venezuela has received 17 flights carrying more than 1,600 members of rescue teams, and over the next 24 hours, the arrival of 25 additional flights is expected," foreign ministry official Oliver Blanco said. "We thank the international community for its support and solidarity during these moments of uncertainty for Venezuelans," Blanco added.

Rescuers have been making their way to sites across La Guaira state and the capital, Caracas. However, some areas still had little official presence on Friday as families and neighbours struggled to find missing loved ones in the rubble, often digging with their bare hands.

Hezbollah chief rejects US-Israel-Lebanon deal

BEIRUT (LEBANON), AFP

Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem condemned the US-Israel-Lebanon framework agreement on Saturday, saying it was a major mistake by Beirut and that his group deemed it null and void.

"The framework agreement in Washington is humiliating, shameful, and a surrender of sovereignty. This agreement is null and void, and the provisions of the Iranian-American memorandum of understanding must be implemented," Qassem said in a statement, accusing Lebanese authorities of "legitimising" Israeli occupation through this "grave blunder".

Meanwhile, Israel struck southern Lebanon on Saturday, a day after the two countries signed a US-brokered security arrangement aimed at easing tensions along their border after months of hostilities.

Lebanon's state news agency said an Israeli drone struck in Nabatieh al-Fawqa, which lies outside a security zone shown on a map published by Israel of an expanded area its troops control in southern Lebanon.

The Israeli military told Reuters it had carried out the strike using a drone, as no Israeli troops were in the immediate area. It said it targeted an individual who posed a threat to its forces, without providing further details or evidence.

3 killed in attack on Pakistan paramilitary headquarters

KARACHI, PTI: At least three paramilitary soldiers were killed on Saturday after terrorists attacked a Pakistan Rangers headquarters in Karachi's heavily populated Gulistan-e-Jauhar area, police said.

Initial investigations suggest the terrorists arrived in a vehicle and entered the compound by ramming the main gate, said Sindh Inspector General of Police Javed Alam Odho, adding that more information is being collected. Rangers personnel responded rapidly, but three of them were killed in the attack, he said.

Odho said an explosion had been heard when the attack began; however, its cause has not been determined yet.

"What is confirmed is that as soon as the attack took place, the Rangers personnel immediately took positions and engaged these attackers in a gun battle," he said.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

People enjoy the water sprayed by a police water cannon at the Brandenburg Gate during the ongoing heatwave in Berlin, Germany, on Saturday. REUTERS

California appeals court upholds Weinstein's rape conviction

▸ An appeals court on Friday upheld Harvey Weinstein's 2022 rape and sexual assault conviction in California but ordered his trial judge to resentence him, AP/PTI reports from Los Angeles.

Harvey Weinstein

A three-judge panel from the California 2nd District Court of Appeal unanimously issued the decision. "We are disappointed by today's decision and respectfully disagree with the Court of Appeal's conclusions regarding the fairness of Mr Weinstein's trial," Weinstein spokesperson Juda Engelmayer said in an email. "At the same time, the court correctly recognised that his sentence cannot stand."

The decision came a day after prosecutors in New York decided Weinstein would not face a fourth trial there, dropping the #MeToo-era case on Thursday after the accuser said she could not bear to testify again. The former movie magnate still stands convicted of another sexual felony in New York, and he remains behind bars. But the New York rape charge had remained unresolved after an overturned conviction followed by two hung juries.

OpenAI, Anthropic face US curbs

▸ ChatGPT maker OpenAI said on Friday that it is restricting the release of its new artificial intelligence model at the request of President Donald Trump's administration, the latest development in an unprecedented government vetting of AI products for cybersecurity risks, AP/PTI reports from New York.

Its chief rival, Anthropic, announced hours later that the Trump administration had approved a limited release of its strongest cybersecurity model, two weeks after the US Commerce Department effectively banned it.

Both companies said their newest models would be available to small groups of trusted partners. OpenAI said its new AI product, called GPT-5.6 Sol, would be accessible only to customers approved by the Trump administration.

A jockey balances on a wooden plough during Pacu Jawi, a traditional bull racing event, in Simabur village, West Sumatra, Indonesia, on Saturday. AFP

UK to expand refugee schemes

▸ The UK interior ministry has announced that it will create new legal routes for asylum seekers, including allowing community organisations to sponsor refugees under a system similar to one used in Canada, AFP reports from London.

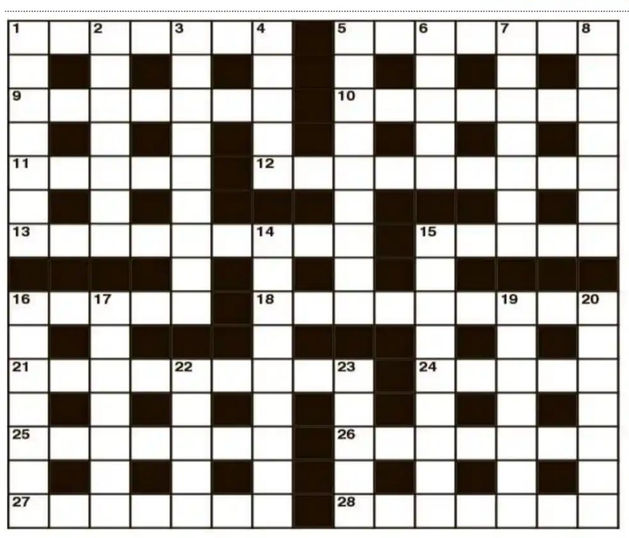
The scheme will come into effect later this year, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said late on Friday. Organisations and some "trusted" universities will be able to sponsor refugees, with the first arrivals expected in autumn 2027. A route allowing employers to sponsor refugees is also expected to open next year, the Home Office said in a press release.

Immigration and asylum are contentious issues in the UK, where the hard-right Reform UK party has rapidly grown in popularity, riding a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Kenya's Gen Z protesters tortured

▸ Six Kenyan protesters arrested during the second anniversary of the landmark "Gen Z" uprising were found "dumped and tortured" on Saturday, AFP reports from Nairobi. Families of those killed by security forces in June 2024, joined by activists and politicians, held a memorial march through Nairobi on Thursday to protest police killings. About 355 people were arrested across the country. But the six protesters arrested outside parliament had remained incommunicado, with rights groups calling for their immediate release.

◆ SUNDAY CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 2686 ◆



ACROSS
1 Aloof (7)
5 Ponder (7)
9 Tension-filled (7)
10 The Windy City (7)
11 Ascent (5)
12 Middle East river (9)
13 Fairly good (9)
15 Fortunate (5)
16 Plant, source of opium (5)
18 Make a quick escape (3,3,3)
21 To backfire (9)
24 Due (5)
25 Exacerbate (7)
26 To comfort (7)
27 Gathering of a crop (7)
28 Something left over (7)

DOWN
1 Amount short (7)
2 Breed of dog with drooping ears (7)
3 A wrangle (4-5)
4 Championship in sport (5)
5 Beneficiary (9)
6 Member of a religious order (5)
7 Springy (7)
8 A leader of Russian revolution (7)
14 Capital of Romania (9)
15 Sleep (4,2,3)
16 Make generally known (7)
17 To hold out (7)
19 A rootstock (7)
20 Fail to care for (7)
22 Avoid doing (5)
23 An adhesive-toed lizard (5)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 4046

CRYPTIC
ACROSS: 9, No both-er 10, Too (two) 11, Alison 12, Skirts 13, Sounded 14, Cast 15, Crossed out 17, Handsome 18, Burni-sh 19, Abel (able) 21, Addled 24, Deserting one's post 27, Stop it 29, Date 30, P-rep-are 33, B-alines-e 35, Come to rest 36, Sp(l)ed 37, Ch-a-sten 38, Less-on 40, M-ore s-O 41, Don 42, Nonsense.
DOWN: 1, Looks round 2, Pour 3, Whiskers 4, Press on 5, Hold the line 6, Sardinians 7, Disc-US 8, C-on-Somme 10, Trust 16, S-end-s up 20, Bight (bite) 22, Dropper 23, Kind regards 25, Rather cool 26, Turns loose 28, Teaspoon 31, Rattling 32, E-mine-nt 34, In-deed 35, Cu-t in 39, Shed.

EASY
ACROSS: 9, Supposed 10, Gnu 11, Active 12, Street 13, Tempted 14, Lore 15, Grass roots 17, Reindeer 18, Bedrock 19, Dawn 21, Tip-off 24, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 27, Nausea 29, Nits 30, Pivotal 33, Abetting 35, Stupendous 36, Bolt 37, Imagery 38, Levity 40, Milieu 41, Hop 42, Negation.
DOWN: 1, Butter bean 2, Apse 3, Esoteric 4, Edition 5, Guttersnipe 6, Hard-bitten 7, Stolid 8, Overleaf 10, Games 16, Scrawls 20, Alert 22, Plywood 23, Ethnography 25, Avaricious 26, Evacuation 28, Ambrosia 31, Ideology 32, Buoyant 34, Titbit 35, Steep 39, Vats.

SU DO KU X - 3960

5						6		3
				5		4		2
		5	2			1	7	9
		2	9					
			3	7		2	6	
	8	7			4			
1								

SOLUTION TO 3959

4	3	7	2	8	1	9	5	6
8	1	2	5	6	9	3	4	7
5	6	9	7	4	3	1	8	2
1	7	8	3	9	5	2	6	4
9	5	6	4	7	2	8	1	3
3	2	4	8	1	6	7	9	5
6	8	3	1	2	4	5	7	9
7	9	5	6	3	8	4	2	1
2	4	1	9	5	7	6	3	8

To solve the puzzle:
The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

TEAMS: 48 VENUES: 16 TOURNAMENT SPAN: 39 DAYS

Cape Verde's dream run: Smallest nation in knockouts

Islanders go unbeaten in the group stage with three draws

HOUSTON, AP

Tiny Cape Verde defied odds to become the smallest country to earn a spot in the World Cup knockout round behind the stellar play of Vozinha, the 40-year-old goalkeeper who embodied the grit of his nation.

"We are small," he said. "But we have big hearts and we are fighters."

Cape Verde completed an improbable run through the group stage with a third straight World Cup draw, a 0-0 draw against Saudi Arabia on Friday night to advance in the tournament.

The small island nation off the western coast of Africa, which is making its debut on soccer's grandest stage, already held 2010 champion Spain to a 0-0 draw and then came from behind to get a 2-2 result against Uruguay.

Cape Verde	Saudi Arabia
0	0

"The team was very eager to show this to the whole world," Cape Verde coach Bubista said while draped in his country's flag. "We are proud of having arrived at this stage. We have shown that we are a small country, but that we fight for the things that we want to achieve."

Cape Verde's three points put the team in second place behind Spain, which beat Uruguay on Friday night and won the group.

Cape Verde players and support staff celebrate after qualifying for the knockouts from Group H behind Spain. AFP

Cape Verde will play reigning World Cup champion Argentina in Miami on July 3.

Drawing all three group matches doesn't guarantee advancement at major soccer tournaments. But several teams have done it in the past, including Wales in 1958, Ireland and the Netherlands in 1990, and Chile in 1998. New Zealand, however, also got three draws at the 2010 World Cup and was eliminated.

On the eve of the match, Bubista mused, "everyone is entitled to dream and nothing is impossible."

The Blue Sharks proved him right, overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds as this country of just more than 500,000 reached the round of 32.

A woman, her face painted with a flag of the archipelago, held a sign that read: "Small Islands, Big Dreams."

A dream that these underdogs have made reality as they continue their charmed run on the world stage.

They did it with another strong game from Vozinha, whose tournament success has helped him amass more than 16 million Instagram followers.

He had a save in first half stoppage time, grabbing a header from Mohamed Kanno to keep Saudi Arabia scoreless. Another save came in the 66th minute when he leaped to deflect a shot from Mohammed Abu Al-Shamat.

A third came in the 92nd minute when he stopped a shot by Abdullah Al-Hamdan.

"There is a lot of quality in our national team," Vozinha said. "Maybe for many of you, you think the Cape Verdean player is not good enough. But we came here to show that we have a lot of quality and we are here to compete and our players can play everywhere in the big competition, in the big leagues."

A group of shirtless men in the crowd each painted one letter of his name on their chests as they cheered Cape Verde.

But Vozinha had a much bigger fan among the crowd of 68,278 as his mother Ana Candida Evora watched from a luxury suite, waving a tiny Cape Verde flag. It was her second match of the tournament after missing Vozinha's epic seven-save performance against Spain because of visa issues.

Uruguay make exit as Spain avoid Argentina

GUADALAJARA (MEXICO), AFP

Uruguay bowed out of the World Cup as goalkeeper Fernando Muslera's howler gifted Spain a 1-0 win in Guadalajara to secure top spot in Group H.

Alex Baena's weak shot slipped through Muslera's grasp for the only goal as Spain avoided a last-32 showdown against Argentina.

The European champions will instead face Austria or Algeria next in Los Angeles on Thursday.

Uruguay's defeat allowed debutants Cape Verde to secure second place and a meeting with Lionel Messi and the defending champions thanks to a 0-0 draw against Saudi Arabia.

Spain	Uruguay
1	0

Two-time winners Uruguay become the highest ranked side to crash out in the group stages as the defeat rounded off a miserable tournament for Marcelo Bielsa and his squad.

After draws against Cape Verde and Saudi Arabia, reports of a revolt in the Uruguay camp emerged with leading players, including Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, clashing with Bielsa over his tactics.

Bielsa controversially substituted Valverde on the hour mark and said the decision to replace Muslera at half-time had been taken by the player himself.

"Journalists and fans of Uruguayan football legitimately want to pin the blame on me. I'm the person responsible and I have to accept it," said Bielsa.

Spain's King Felipe was among those in attendance but the only clash between two former winners of the World Cup in the group stages was a huge disappointment.

Lamine Yamal's to the starting line-up had sparked the Spanish attack into life in a 4-0 thrashing of Saudi Arabia after La Roja began in underwhelming fashion with a goalless draw against Cape Verde.

But another laboured attacking performance leaves Luis de la Fuente with plenty to ponder before the knockout stages begin on Sunday.

To add to Spain's concerns a shoulder injury suffered by Yeremy Pino may have ended his tournament, while Nico Williams also ended a bruising encounter with a muscle problem.

"In football, you can't always play with the brilliance you wish for, or that we are capable of showing at other times," said De la Fuente.

"We maintained an incredibly high level of concentration, responsibility, and composure, and we avoided rising to the many provocations that could have led to serious trouble."

A hero of Uruguay's run to the semi-finals in 2010, Muslera was at fault for both Cape Verde's goals in a 2-2 draw.

And in Guadalajara, Spain had barely threatened the Uruguay goal before the 40-year-old allowed Baena's shot to dribble over the line from Marcos Llorente's cross on 42 minutes.

Muslera was replaced at half-time by Sergio Rochet and the Uruguay boss made an even bolder call when Valverde was taken off on the hour mark.

Spain's Alex Baena (not seen in pic) scores their winning goal as Uruguay's Fernando Muslera lets the ball slip out of his hands in Guadalajara, Mexico. REUTERS

Egypt advance amid the chaos

SEATTLE, AP

An Iranian fan rushed the field in celebration, necessitating seven security guards to successfully bring him down.

Shoja Khalilzadeh ripped his jersey off before being mobbed by the entire Iran team after he fired a shot past Egypt goalie Mostafa Shobeir in the 93rd minute to seemingly give his side a 2-1 lead on Friday night.

Egypt	Iran
1	1

For a few joyous moments, Iran was convinced it had advanced to the knockout round at the World Cup for the first time in the expanded 48-team pool at this year's tournament.

The potential late winning goal was called back due to an offside, though, and Egypt advanced past the group stage.

Iran, meanwhile, will have to wait one day to find out its fate after the two teams played to a 1-1 draw. Egypt will play Australia in the round of 32.

Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei lamented what was the third goal by his side waved off by video review in the tournament.

"Technology is justice," Ghalenoei said in Farsi, "But, I'm upset about our bad luck."

At the conclusion of what was promoted as a "Pride Match" in Seattle, one which neither Iran nor Egypt wanted any part in, the Pharaohs finished in second place in Group G. Belgium, which played to a 1-1 draw against Egypt on June 15, beat New Zealand 5-1 in Vancouver, British Columbia to win the group outright.

Egypt coach Hossam Hassan was grateful his team didn't slide to third in the group, which would have been the case had Khalilzadeh's goal held up.

"We knew we had qualified already, we were sitting at the top of the group," Hossan said. "I thank God for everything. After this goal was ruled offside, I was very happy."

Iran, meanwhile, could still advance to the knockout round for the first time in the expanded 48-team pool at this year's tournament. But, they no longer controls their own destiny after Friday's game.

"We're here to make our history, too," said midfielder Rouzbeh Cheshmi. "(Saturday), if our dream comes true, thank God. If not, we are proud of our game and our players because of how we did the game. The last three games, we held up, so let's see what happens."

Egypt took an early lead on a goal by Mahmoud Saber in the fifth minute. Former Liverpool star Mohamed Salah provided some strong play in the box before Saber fired a shot between the legs of Iranian goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Iran was denied an equalizer in the 11th minute when Egypt goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir saved a penalty kick, but tied the game in the 14th minute on a goal by Ramin Rezaeian.

After Iran came up just short, its players aired their grievances about numerous complications off the field. The team has endured travel restrictions imposed by the US Department of Homeland Security in light of the war in Iran.

In March, Iran sought to move its group-stage matches to Mexico, with which it has diplomatic ties. Its request to move its base camp from Tucson, Arizona, to Tijuana was granted two weeks before the team's arrival.

Egypt players celebrate after scoring during their 1-1 draw with Iran. REUTERS

Messi not to start against Jordanians

DALLAS, REUTERS

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni confirmed Lionel Messi will start on the bench when the reigning World Cup champions take on Jordan in their final Group F match at Dallas Stadium on Saturday.

The Inter Miami playmaker has scored all five of his team's goals in their wins over Algeria and Austria as Argentina have booked their place in the knockout rounds with one group phase match remaining.

"Leo will start on the bench," Scaloni said in response to a question from 91-year-old Argentine radio journalist Enrique Macaya Marquez, who is working at his 18th World Cup. "I'm answering because you deserve a sincere answer.

"Leo will come in a little bit later."

Argentina have already secured pole position in the group and Scaloni dismissed suggestions he was fielding a weakened side with one eye on the challenges that lie ahead in the knockout rounds.

"Those that are playing tomorrow deserve to play, they are part of the team," he said. "All the effort we've put in in training is because of them, that's why we're here. They are making every effort when they're not playing.

"I'd love to give everybody minutes and when I have the chance I do and it's because they deserve it. They are fantastic players too.

Argentina's Lionel Messi during a training session in Kansas City. REUTERS

Austria, Algeria in shoot-out for second place

REUTERS, HOUSTON

Austria and Algeria will be involved in a straight shoot-out for second place in their World Cup Group J when they clash in Kansas City on Saturday, though a draw may suit both sides as they push for a place in the round of 32.

Argentina have already been confirmed as pool winners, while Austria and Algeria each have three points and Jordan zero heading into the final round of games.

The winner in Kansas City will therefore take second spot, while a draw will mean Austria remain in that position by virtue of their superior goal-difference, but Algeria would likely advance as one of the best third-placed sides across the 12 groups with four points.

But there is a twist to this tale as things stand, it might be more beneficial to finish third in the group than second.

The runner-up in the pool is on course to meet fancied Spain in the round of 32, while the third-place side could face Group B winners Switzerland, albeit they are no soft touch either.

Both Austria and Algeria have been on the end of a Lionel Messi masterclass when they faced Argentina in their pool, but this looks like a more even match-up.

Algeria forward Mohamed Amoura missed the 2-1 victory over Jordan in his side's previous fixture and is a doubt, while Austria's Stefan Posch remarkably played with a broken jaw against Argentina but appeared to come through the experience fine.

Algeria head coach Vladimir Petkovic. AFP

Austria head coach Ralf Rangnick. AFP

Iranians on an emotional World Cup roller-coaster

TEHRAN, AFP

Iranians woke up early on Saturday to watch the men's national football team face Egypt, riding an emotional roller-coaster as Iran fought back to draw but missed the chance to directly qualify for the World Cup last 32.

But all is not lost for Team Melli after the 1-1 draw. Depending on the results in other groups, the Iranians could still reach the knockout stage for the first time in their history.

Iran had a troubled build-up to the World Cup due to the war in the Middle East, which broke out in late February with US-Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic.

The team has also faced the strain of considerable visa and travel restrictions in the United States, which is co-hosting the 2026 tournament with Mexico and Canada.

"It was a good game, even though they were unable to prepare properly," said Iranian football fan Amin.

"I wish they'd played the whole game like the last five minutes," when Iran was on the attack, the 33-year-old car dealer told AFP.

Fans in Tehran watched a broadcast of the match in a packed hall dotted with Iranian flags and portraits of the Islamic republic's late supreme leader Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of the Middle East war.

Iran fans watching their Group G game against Egypt in Tehran. AFP

Who are in the knockouts so far

- **Group A:** Mexico, South Africa
- **Group B:** Switzerland, Canada & Bosnia
- **Group C:** Brazil, Morocco
- **Group D:** United States, Australia, Paraguay
- **Group E:** Germany, Ivory Coast, Ecuador
- **Group F:** Netherlands, Japan, Sweden
- **Group G:** Belgium, Egypt
- **Group H:** Spain, Cape Verde
- **Group I:** France, Norway, Senegal
- **Group J:** Argentina
- **Group K:** Portugal, Colombia
- **Group L:** England, Ghana

TEAMS: 48 VENUES: 16 TOURNAMENT SPAN: 39 DAYS

FIFA WORLD CUP

Bastian denies allegations

Former Germany player Bastian Schweinsteiger said on Friday he was talking about Ivory Coast's style and not its players when he spoke last weekend about what his country's national team, reports AP from New York.

Schweinsteiger called it, "A bit African football, a bit unorthodox, a bit wild, a bit perhaps also not so conditioned by tactics" and added it was unpredictable. Ivory Coast coach Emerse Faé slammed those comments on Thursday as being racist.

"It's a football analysis. Nothing more and nothing less. ..I certainly didn't mean to offend anyone."

Deschamps back with squad

France number two Guy Stephan confirmed that coach Didier Deschamps would be back with the squad at the World Cup in time for training on Saturday after a quick trip back home to attend his mother's funeral, reports AFP from Foxborough.

"Obviously I am thinking a lot about Didier. I will talk to him later but we are all really pleased that he is coming back really soon and he will be at training tomorrow afternoon," Stephan told reporters after France's 4-1 win over Norway in their final group game on Friday.

Times Square turns into fan hub

Surrounded by dozens of dazzling screens and crowds of tourists, World Cup fans have turned New York's Times Square into a daily meeting spot for supporters from around the globe, reports AFP from New York.

Amid a scent of beer and marijuana, many street vendors have descended on Times Square to sell flags, caps, vuvuzelas, fruit slices and churros. Elsewhere, one man was begging and another with a sign reading "Stop World War III!" A woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty was offering to be photographed.

Australia's Leckie, Italiano out

Injured Australian pair Mathew Leckie and Jacob Italiano were ruled out of the World Cup Friday ahead of their last-32 clash with Egypt, leaving the Socceroos to complete the tournament with 24 players, reports AFP from Oakland.

On Sunday

Group J

Algeria vs **Austria** (7.30 am)

Jordan vs **Argentina** (7.30 am)

Live on Zee5 & Unite8.
All timings in IST

Belgium advance with rout of New Zealand

Trossard strikes brace; De Bruyne & Lukaku net one goal each

VANCOUVER, AFP

Belgium's Leandro Trossard (right) celebrates after scoring their first goal against New Zealand during their Group G game in Vancouver, Canada. REUTERS

Belgium defeated New Zealand 5-1 to book their place in the knockout rounds of the World Cup on Friday, securing their first win of the tournament to finish on top of Group G in Vancouver.

A double strike from Arsenal's Leandro Trossard and goals from Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Saelemaekers carried the Red Devils into the last 32 in the first place ahead of Egypt on goal difference.

Egypt claimed the runners-up spot after a 1-1 draw with Iran in Seattle. The Iranians finished third in the group.

Belgium dominated a lopsided first half and had alarm bells ringing in the New Zealand defence early on when Trossard's angled shot cannoned of the inside of the upright only to be cleared off the line by Tyler Binden.

The Red Devils looked poised to take the lead moments later when Jordanian referee Adham Mohammad pointed to the penalty spot after Trossard's shot hit the arm of covering defender Finn Surman.

But VAR sent Mohammad to the monitor to take another look at the decision, which was subsequently overturned and New Zealand breathed again.

Belgium	New Zealand
5	1

Yet Belgium did not have long to wait before the breakthrough and again it was Trossard who proved to be in the right place at the right time, bundling home from close range after De Bruyne's corner sowed panic in the six-yard box.

Trossard effectively made the game safe five minutes into the second half, controlling a rebound in a crowded area to volley home past New Zealand goalkeeper Max Crocombe at the near post.

De Bruyne then stroked home an elegant low finish in the 66th minute to make it 3-0, a crucial goal which saw the Belgians leapfrog over Egypt into first place on goal difference.

Yet there was to be a dramatic end when New Zealand's Elijah Just volleyed home a consolation strike from the edge of the area to make it 3-1.

That could have been potentially costly, with the goal suddenly bumping Belgium down into second place.

But Lukaku nodded home his team's fourth in the 86th minute with his first touch just a minute after coming on as a substitute to return Belgium to the top of the table.

Pape Gueye (left) scored twice in Senegal's win over a 10-man Iraq to help Africans advance to the round of 32. REUTERS

Senegal sail past Iraq to qualify

TORONTO, AP

Senegal needed to win and it needed to win big. Done and done.

Senegal racked up the goals on 10-man Iraq in a 5-0 victory on Friday helped them reach the World Cup knockout stages.

"The job is done, but fate is no longer in our hands," Senegal coach Pape Thiaw said. "We have to wait until the other matches are over."

Senegal	Iraq
5	0

Pape Gueye scored twice in a second-half flurry as the Senegalese - vying to advance from third place in Group I - took advantage of a first-half red card on Iraq defender Rebin Sulaka, who prevented Sadio Mane from going in on goal alone by yanking his shirt.

Habib Diarra scored in the fourth minute and even though Sulaka was sent off in the 13th, Senegal didn't find the net again until Ismaila Sarr's goal in the 56th minute.

Gueye then added his two goals, both hard blasts from around the edge of the penalty area, and Iliman Ndiaye netted Senegal's fifth.

Senegal now has three points and a plus-two goal differential. The eight best third-place teams advance to the Round of 32.

"We had to score as many goals as possible," Gueye said. "So there you go."

Diarra also seemed confident Senegal will be among the teams that move on.

"They gave us problems, but we solved them," he said.

Dembele treble helps France hammer Norway

FOXBOROUGH (USA), REUTERS

Ousmane Dembele (second from right) fires France's third goal to complete his maiden World Cup hat-trick in their match against Norway in Foxborough. REUTERS

Ousmane Dembele scored a first-half hat-trick as France made sure of top spot in World Cup Group I with a ruthless 4-1 win on Friday over a second-string Norway who like the French had already qualified for the next round of the tournament.

The winger scored three times in the space of 25 minutes in the first period to send the 2018 world champions and 2022 runners-up into the Round of 32 with a spring in their step.

The France players had promised to go for their third win in as many games as a tribute to coach Didier Deschamps who has flown home from the US to attend the funeral of his mother.

"We really wanted to be there for Didier and to be up to the task," said France assistant coach Guy Stephan - who has been Deschamps' right-hand man since their Olympique de Marseille days. "I will call him and he will be ecstatic."

By taking first place in the group, France set up a meeting with Sweden in the first knockout round, while second-placed Norway will play Ivory Coast.

Deschamps will return to the squad on Saturday.

Although France and Norway had made sure of a last-32 place before Friday's clash, the French made it clear they wanted to come top to take advantage of a lighter travel schedule offered by the tournament's North American criss-crossing route map.

France	Norway
4	1

Their task was made easier by Norway coach Stale Solbakken's decision to rest all but one of the players who started against Senegal earlier this week, including goal-scoring machine Erling Haaland and captain Martin Odegaard.

France went on the attack from the kickoff. Kylian Mbappe, who is likely to be challenging Haaland for the World Cup's Golden Boot top scorer award, slammed an angled shot off the bar with barely 20 seconds on the clock.

Six minutes later Mbappe swept a glorious cross-field pass to Dembele who cut inside and then outside a defender before blasting an angled shot past goalkeeper Egil Selvik.

Mbappe fed Dembele again in the 20th minute and the Paris St Germain forward gained a yard of space against his marker to score with a dipping shot.

Norway pulled a goal back almost immediately through Thelo Aasgaard before Dembele became the third France player to score a World Cup treble – after Just Fontaine in the 1950s and Mbappe - by curling a low shot into the bottom corner in the 32nd.

It was the second-earliest hat-trick ever scored at a World Cup, behind Erich Probst who got three goals for Austria in 1954 against Czechoslovakia after 24 minutes.

Dembele displays Ballon d'Or brilliance with a hat-trick

Ousmane Dembele celebrates scoring France's third goal. AFP

FOXBOROUGH (USA), AFP

Ousmane Dembele produced his best ever World Cup performance with a stunning first-half hat-trick in France's 4-1 win over Norway on Friday, and then insisted it was his least impressive performance of this year's tournament so far.

The 29-year-old Paris Saint-Germain forward showcased the lethal finishing which saw him win last year's Ballon d'Or as he netted three times in the space of 26 first-half minutes at the Gillette Stadium near Boston.

His goals, as well as a late Desire Doue header, allowed France to complete the first round with three wins out of three after earlier victories against Senegal and Iraq.

They progress to the last 32 as Group I winners, and there is clear evidence that France can be contenders to win the World Cup even if Kylian Mbappe is not scoring the goals.

"This is a unique and important moment for me. But I preferred how I played against Senegal or against Iraq," Dembele claimed.

"I think I was much more influential in those games, so I think we need to stay fully concentrated because we have important things ahead of us."

Dembele's focus was striking, almost as impressive as his finishing against Norway, as he scored only the fourth hat-trick by a France player at a World Cup.

Just Fontaine scored two during his incredible 1958 tournament, including four goals in the third-place play-off against West Germany.

Kylian Mbappe then netted an astonishing hat-trick in the 2022 final, which France lost on penalties to Lionel Messi's Argentina in Qatar.

It is easily forgotten now in the madness of that game, but Dembele was actually substituted before half-time with France trailing 2-0 and appearing listless.

He had played a key role on their run to the final, having also made four appearances as a 21-year-old during France's triumphant campaign in Russia in 2018.

But he had never scored a World Cup goal before breaking his duck on his 13th tournament appearance, in last Monday's 3-0 win over Iraq on a stormy evening in Philadelphia.

Dutch dream gathers pace as Orange wave grips World Cup

KANSAS CITY, AFP

Few observers tipped the Netherlands as potential World Cup winners, but a quietly efficient group-stage campaign has propelled them firmly into the conversation.

Ronald Koeman's team beat Tunisia 3-1 in Kansas City on Thursday to top Group F with seven points, ahead of Japan and Sweden, who both also qualified for the knockout rounds.

Next, the Dutch face Morocco in the Mexican city of Monterrey on Monday, with the winners of that last-32 match going on to face South Africa or Canada.

It was put to Koeman after Thursday's game in the stormy American Midwest that they had done the hard part by topping their group, thus avoiding Brazil.

But the head coach, who captained the Netherlands the last time the World Cup was held in the United States, in 1994, warned against thinking too far ahead.

"We need to prepare for Morocco first because it will be a big game," he said.

"It's a good team with a lot of quality, and they can score easily."

The Netherlands, followed everywhere by their legions of orange-clad fans, are World Cup royalty but have never been crowned, finishing as runners-up in 1974, 1978 and 2010.

Often cited as the best nation never to have won the tournament, they are unbeaten in 15 World Cup matches since losing the final in 2010, if penalty shootouts are excluded.

The team did not qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

It is difficult to argue that the Dutch do not punch above their weight for a country with a population of about 18 million.

On the other hand, they have boasted richly talented squads for generation after generation, none of whom have managed to get over the line.

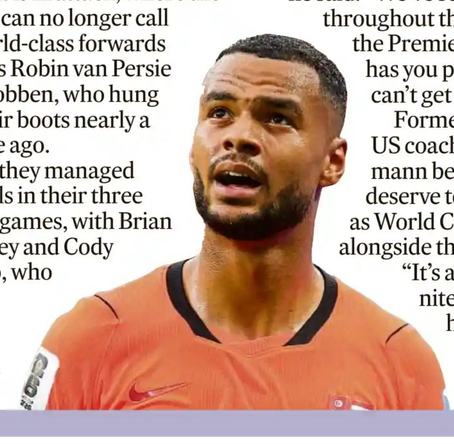
Koeman's squad lacks the superstar names of the past such as Johann Cruyff, Marco van Basten and Arjen Robben but he still has great quality and depth, particularly in midfield and defence.

Liverpool centre-back Virgil van Dijk is the undisputed leader of the pack, marshalling a powerful back line that includes Denzel Dumfries and Micky van de Ven.

The midfield is also elite, with Frenkie de Jong pulling the strings alongside Ryan Gravenberch and Tijjani Reijnders.

If there is a weaker area of the team, it is in attack, where the Dutch can no longer call on world-class forwards such as Robin van Persie and Robben, who hung up their boots nearly a decade ago.

But they managed 10 goals in their three group games, with Brian Brobbey and Cody Gakpo, who has a knack of scoring at major tournaments, sharing five goals between them.



Brian Brobbey (left) and Cody Gakpo, who between them have five goals, have sparked Netherlands' World Cup hopes. AFP

Sunderland's Brobbey was only given a few minutes at the end of the Netherlands' opening game -- a 2-2 draw against Japan -- but he has since proved his worth, netting three times.

Van Dijk said the powerful forward was a great outlet.

"Brian's quality is so strong," he said. "We've seen it obviously throughout the whole year in the Premier League. If he has you pinned up, you can't get the ball."

Former Germany and US coach Jurgen Klinsmann believes the Dutch deserve to be considered as World Cup contenders alongside the usual suspects.

"It's a team that definitely you've got to have on the plate for going far," he said.

Roopa elected KGA Captain

BENGALURU, DHNS: Roopa Pratap **(in pic)** became the first lady Captain of a golf club in India when she was elected for the post during Karnataka Golf Association's AGM on Friday, according to the association's release.

Office bearers: President: Col C P Nanjappa; Captain: Roopa Pratap; Hon Secretary: Hari R Achanta; Hon Treasurer: Devaiah S Thennira.
Committee members: SQN Ashok Gowda, Girish C Panth, Capt A S Kumaran, Prasanth C, J M Swamy.

Iron Mirage wins feature

BENGALURU RESULTS

P Prasanna Kumar-trained Iron Mirage, ridden by Akshay Kumar, won the SM Cama Music and Production Pvt Ltd Juvenile Million Sprinters Million (Grade-III), the feature event of the races on Saturday.

1. The Smart Chieftain Plate - 1400M: Rampage (Jaydev M Mody) Yash Narredu 1, Ashwa New York (Suraj Narredu) 2, Shining Path (Akshay Kumar) 3, Taaqath (Saqlain) 4. WB: 2-1/2, 2-3/4, 1. T: 1:25.10. Tote: Rs 15 (w) 11, 10, 15 p; Shp: Rs 20; Thp: Rs 28; Fc: Rs 24; Q: Rs 15; Tri: Rs 37 & 42; Exp: Rs 162 & 182. TB: Shazaan Shah. Fav: Rampage.
2. The Poonawalla Stud Plate (Div II) - 1200M: Defence Counsel (M Venkatesh) Vivek G 1, Bestidentification (Ashhad Asbar) 2, LaMcQueen (Aleemuddin) 3, Aherne (Antony Raj) 4. WB: 4, Hd, 1-1/2. T: 1:12.49. Tote: Rs 40 (w) 13, 13, 13 p; Shp: Rs 30; Thp: Rs 34; Fc: Rs 103; Q: Rs 30; Tri: Rs 206 & 136; Exp: Rs 1332 & 666. TB: S Dominic. Fav: Bestidentification.
3. The Aastronomic Plate - 2000M: Youremanorborne (B Vijeth Bhandari) A Sandesh 1, Winfield (Antony Raj) 2, Storm Shadow (Vivek G) 3, Badshaah (A Fazal) 4. NR: Maana. WB: 3/4, 1, 2. T: 2:08.67. Tote: Rs 14 (w) 10, 11, 11 p; Shp: Rs 23; Thp: Rs 32; Fc: Rs 23; Q: Rs 24; Tri: Rs 40 & 25; Exp: Rs 168 & 109. TB: PS Chouhan. Fav: Youremanorborne.
4. The Managing Committee Gold Cup - 1600M: Promiseofthefuture (Ameeta Mehta) Neeraj Rawal 1, Xanthe (Hindu Singh) 2, Touch Of Grey (Saurav Rawat) 3, Victory Hugo (Anush Anamo Hangal) 4. WB: 4-1/4, 3, 2 1/2. T: 1:36.94. Tote: Rs 19 (w) 11, 13 p; Shp: Rs 21; Thp: Rs 38; Fc: Rs 31; Q: Rs 22; Tri: Rs 214 & 159; Exp: Rs 699 & 202. TB: I Ghatala. Fav: Promiseofthefuture.
5. The SM Cama Music and Production Pvt Ltd Juvenile Sprinters' Million (Grade-III) - 1200M: Iron Mirage (Meka Yugandhar, Capt Jamshed Appoo, Manoj Kumar, Ashok Ranpise and DT Racing Breeding) Akshay Kumar 1, Shrishti (Yash Narredu) 2, A Great Buzz (Pavan) 3, Burevestnik (A Sandesh) 4. WB: 9-1/2, 3/4, 9-1/4. T: 1:22.39. Tote: Rs 11 (w) 10, 31 p; Shp: Rs: 46; Thp: Rs 23; Fc: Rs 61; Q: Rs 40; Tri: Rs 204 & 37; Exp: Rs 128 & 56. TB: P Prasanna Kumar. Fav: Iron Mirage.
6. The Malakpet Plate - 1300M: Shining Ways (Daulat Chhabria, Teja Gollapudi, Dr Prabhakar Chowdary and Ashok Ranpise) Suraj Narredu 1, Power Of The Sea (S Shareef) 2, Lasya (Vishal Bunde) 3, Rocking Star (AR Pradeep) 4. NR: Big B. WB: 3, 1, 1. T: 1:19.26. Tote: Rs 14 (w) 13, 22, 31p; Shp: Rs: 69; Thp: Rs 53; Fc: Rs 196; Q: Rs 102; Tri: Rs 991 & 328; Exp: Rs 3866 & 1656. TB: Rajesh Narredu. Fav: Shining Ways.
7. The Poonawalla Stud Plate (Div I) - 1200M: Kabali (Santosh P) AR Pradeep 1, Felisa (Arvind Kumar) 2, Aquastic (S Sachin) 3, Senor Cherie (Akshay Kumar) 4. WB: 2-3/4, 1/2, 1/2. T: 1:11.48. Tote: Rs 67 (w) 19, 17, 12 p; Shp: Rs 49; Thp: Rs 49; Fc: Rs 1483; Q: Rs 631; Tri: Rs 1376 & 944; Exp: Rs 7508 & 3217. TB: G Sandhu. Fav: Aquastic.
Jackpot: Rs 1908 & 27. **Mini Jackpot:** Rs 1139. **I treble:** Rs 171. **II treble:** Rs 505.

Rieko for main event

BENGALURU SELECTIONS

S John-trained Rieko, to be ridden by Neeraj Rawal, is fancied to win the Chief Minister's Cup, the feature event of the races here on Sunday. The first race starts at 2:00 pm.
1. The Littleover Plate -- 1200M: Preview 1, Auspicious King 2, Calix 3.
2. The Mahalakshmi Plate -- 1600M: Michiko 1, Magna Carta 2, Sea Diamond 3.
3. The Richelieu Stakes -- 1400M: Lots Of Luck 1, Steely Challenge 2, Queendom 3.
4. The Chief Minister's Cup -- 1200M: Rieko 1, Knotty Charmer 2, Dream Seller 3.
5. The Karnataka Sub-Area Cup -- 1400M: Mahler 1, Vegatha 2, Lux Aeterna 3.
6. The Tudor Jet Plate -- 1200M: River Deep 1, Carat Love 2, II Volo 3.
7. The Desert God Plate -- 1600M: Regal Aristocracy 1, Pledge 2, Imperador 3.
Day's best: Preview. **Jackpot:** 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7. **Mini jackpot:** 4, 5, 6 & 7.
I treble: 2, 3 & 4.
II treble: 5, 6 & 7.

◆ ON TV ◆

CRICKET

2nd T20I: Ireland vs India **(6 pm)**. **Sony Sports Network.**

Women's WC: South Africa vs Bangladesh **(3 pm)**, Australia vs India **(7 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports Network, JioHotstar.**

3rd Test: England vs New Zealand **(day 4, 3:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network.**

1st Test: West Indies vs Sri Lanka **(day 4, 7:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on FanCode.

4-day Test: Sri Lanka A vs India A **(day 4, 10 am)**. **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network.**

Maharaja T20 Trophy: Shivamogga Yodhas vs Coastal Kings Mangaluru **(7 pm)**. **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

HOCKEY

FIH Pro League: England vs India **(8:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **Star Sports** Network, JioHotstar.

MOTORSPORT

Formula 1: Austrian GP **(main race, 6:30 pm)**. **LIVE** on **FanCode.**

CRICKET T20 WORLD CUP

India in must-win spot

Harmanpreet's girls take on dominant Australia with semis spot on the line

LONDON, PTI

With a place in the Women's T20 World Cup semifinals on the line, India will be desperate to overcome their fielding and batting woes when they take on six-time champions Australia in their final Group A clash here on Sunday.

The day's two matches will determine the semifinal lineup from the group, with South Africa (six points) taking on Bangladesh (four) at Lord's before India (six) meet unbeaten Australia (eight).

Given South Africa's overwhelming head-to-head (9-2 in 12 matches) record against Bangladesh, India's clash against Australia is expected to become a virtual quarterfinal for the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side.

If the Proteas, who are the last edition's finalists, win as anticipated, India will have to beat Australia to qualify, while a defeat would end the hopes of the reigning ODI world champions.

Australia, on the other hand, can still afford a loss and progress courtesy their eight points and a far superior net run rate of 4.724.

However, an unlikely Bangladesh upset would ease the pressure on India as even in defeat, Kaur's side could still sneak into the last-four if their net run rate of 2.268 remains superior to South Africa's current 0.734.

But it will be no less than a test of character for Harmanpreet Kaur's side who have battled one issue after another throughout this campaign.

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur will hope to lead India from the front in their all-important final group game against Australia. AFP FILE PHOTO

LIVE 7:00 PM, STAR SPORTS

India's tournament began with the form of their openers being a concern.

But even as Smriti Mandhana (167 runs) and Shafali Verma (145) responded well, India's middle-order comprising skipper Harmanpreet (85) and Jemimah Rodrigues (58) came up short repeatedly.

While grappling with that problem, India's fielding nose dived, particularly in the last two games where they have collectively dropped six catches.

India lost one of those matches - against South Africa - while they beat Bangladesh by five wickets to remain afloat even after spilling four catches.

The Indian think tank, led by Harmanpreet and head coach Amol Muzumdar, would thus know no such errors may allow them a chance to comeback in the contest against a rampant Australia, who are on a roll with their unbeaten run.

There is no particular explanation to why India's fielding has been as poor as it has been in the last two games.

Radha Yadav, who has generally been an excellent fielder, has dropped three of those six catches including two against South Africa.

India will undoubtedly draw inspiration from their victory over Australia in the the ODI World Cup's semifinal, in which an innings of a lifetime from Jemimah helped them overcome the final frontier and set them on the path for their first-ever global title win.

Ireland stun West Indies

Ireland finally won in the Women's T20 World Cup by ending a 0-21 losing streak across five tournaments going back 12 years when they defeated the West Indies by six wickets with 11 balls remaining on Saturday, reports AP from Bristol, England.

The West Indies would have qualified for the semifinals if it had won. Instead, the defeat gave a lifeline to defending champion New Zealand.

Ireland limited West Indies to 128-7 and Orla Prendergast led the chase with a 44-ball 63 as they reached 129-4 in 18.1 overs.

Star-studded India seek improved batting show

Shreyas' men eye series-levelling win against Ireland

LIVE 6:00 PM, SONY SPORTS

BELFAST, PTI

India's star-studded top-order will be under pressure to make amends when they take on a buoyant Ireland in the second and final T20I here on Sunday, with Shreyas Iyer's men aiming to level the series after a shocking defeat in the opener.

Playing their first match since their T20 World Cup triumph, the reigning champions were handed one of their biggest upsets as Ireland defended 182 to bowl them out for 148 and register their maiden international victory over India here on Friday.

It was hardly the start Iyer would have envisioned on his return to T20Is after 963 days, and his first assignment as India's T20 captain.

With a five-match series against England beginning at Chester-le-Street on Wednesday, Iyer, who has replaced India's T20 World Cup winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav, would be eager to sign off their brief Ireland tour on a winning note.

The biggest concern from the opening game was India's batting collapse.

Sanju Samson, India's World Cup hero three months back, lasted just four balls before becoming debutant Jai Moondra's maiden international wicket.

Ishan Kishan and Iyer too fell for single-digit scores inside the powerplay as India slipped into early trouble.

At the other end, Abhishek Sharma carried on in his usual explosive manner, striking the ball cleanly at the top, but lacked support from the other end. His dismissal after the powerplay derailed India's chase. Ireland's two debutant pacers, Moondra and Matt Hollard, exposed India's top order brilliantly.

While Moondra removed Samson with his very first delivery in international cricket, Hollard dismissed Kishan and Iyer before claiming Washington Sundar to finish with three wickets.

With run-rate pressure mounting, Tilak Varma, Washington, Shivam Dube couldn't consolidate. The outcome of the second contest, thus, could hinge on how India's batters tackle the inexperienced but confident Irish pace duo could once again.

Sooryanvashi's debut

The team management is unlikely to press the panic button after one defeat.

Teen sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, who was anticipated by many to make his international debut in the opener, is expected to remain on the sidelines again as India are unlikely to tinker top order after one defeat.

Accommodating the left-hander would require a reshuffle, possibly pushing Samson down the order at the expense of Washington.

The bowling unit, on the other hand, offered several positives.

Harshit Rana made an impressive comeback after a four-month layoff due to a knee injury, using his variations smartly to return figures of 3/24. Arshdeep Singh and Axar Patel also bowled well, especially at the death.

However, Iyer's decision to front-load his pace attack left India short of options in the closing overs.

Washington leaked 19 runs in the 16th over before Prasidh Krishna endured another forgettable outing, conceding 27 in the 17th.

After a poor outing in the first T20I in Belfast, opener Sanju Samson will hope for a better batting performance in the second game. PTI FILE PHOTO

India rout Pakistan 7-1

LONDON, PTI

The Indian men's hockey team produced a dominant display to thrash arch-rivals Pakistan 7-1 in the reverse fixture of the FIH Pro League's London leg.

After conceding an early goal, India stormed back through strikes from Sukhjeet Singh (20th), Harmanpreet Singh (26th), Hardik Singh (34th), Jugraj Singh (35th), Abhishek (41st), Raj Kumar Pal (44th) and Dilpreet Singh (54th) to register an emphatic victory at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre here on Friday.

Midfielder Hardik was adjudged the Player of the Match.

The contest began at a frenetic pace, with India earning the first penalty corner inside 90 seconds following a sharp baseline run by Mandeep Singh. Pakistan, however, looked dangerous on the counter and won a penalty corner in the 13th minute.

After India lost a video referral, Pakistan captain Abu Bakar Mahmood converted the ensuing drag-flick to put his side 1-0 ahead.

India produced a brilliant attacking performance to thrash Pakistan 7-1 in London. HI MEDIA

India seized control in the second quarter with quick ball movement and accurate long passes that stretched the Pakistan defence.

Pakistan suffered a setback in the 18th minute when Ahmad Nadeem was struck on the face by a deflected pass from teammate Ali Ghazanfar and had to leave the field.

India capitalised almost immediately. Harmanpreet's powerful drag-flick from a penalty corner was deftly deflected home by Sukhjeet in the 20th minute to restore parity.

Six minutes later, the Indian skipper found the top-left corner with another drag-flick from a penalty corner to hand India a 2-1 lead at halftime.

India extended their dominance after the break. Consecutive penalty corners in the 34th minute led to a penalty stroke, which Hardik calmly converted to make it 3-1.

Ravindra leads NZ charge after Archer's strikes

NOTTINGHAM, AFP: Rachin Ravindra's unbeaten fifty kept England at bay after Jofra Archer's double strike rocked New Zealand in the third and deciding Test at Trent Bridge on Saturday.

New Zealand, with the three-match series up for grabs at 1-1, were faltering at 12-2 in their second innings following fast bowler Archer's two wickets after tea on the third day.

But at stumps they had recovered to 120-3, an overall lead of 204 runs, to set up an intriguing finish with two full days remaining.

Ravindra was 60 not out, the 12th time in his 24 Tests he had scored 50 or more.

Fast bowler Archer impressived with figures of 2-14 in seven overs to give England hope of victory.

Brief scores: New Zealand: 438 all out & 120/3 in 35 overs (Rachin Ravindra 60 n.o., Daryl Mitchell 26 n.o.) vs England (O/n: 223/2): 354 all out in 88.2 overs (Ben Duckett 113, Jacob Bethell 74, Harry Brook 58; Nathan Smith 4-91, Will O'Rourke 3-53, Zak Foulkes 3-35).

Nabi sizzles with new ball as India A take big lead

GALLE (SRI LANKA), PTI: Jammu and Kashmir seamer Auqib Nabi **(in pic)** showed his prowess with the second new ball as his four-wicket burst put India 'A' on the driver's seat with an overall lead of 170 runs against Sri Lanka 'A' on the third day of the opening 'Test'.

Starting the day at 113 for 2, Sri Lanka 'A' were in a comfortable position reaching 300 for 5 when Nabi bowled a charged up spell with the second new ball to dismiss the hosts for 330.

Nabi's figures were 4 for 58 in 19.4 overs and that gave India a substantial first innings lead of 122. India had scored 452 for six in its first essay.

At stumps, India consolidated their position further to reach 48 for no loss in the second innings although opener and Sai Sudharsan retired hurt on 4.

Brief scores: India A: 452/6 decl & 48/0 in 17 overs vs Sri Lanka A (O/n: 113/2): 330 all out in 101.4 overs (Nuwanidu Fernando 84, Ashen Bandara 70, Sahan Arachchige 72; Auqib Nabi Dar 4-58, Yash Thakur 2-51, Harsh Dubey 2-84).

Russell on pole for Austria GP

SPIELBERG (AUSTRIA), AFP: George Russell produced a dramatic late and contentious fastest lap in his Mercedes on Saturday to claim pole position ahead of the two Ferraris for Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix.

The 28-year-old Briton swept into the prime grid position with a lap in one minute and 06.113 seconds - including a need to lift through a section of waved yellow flags.

His lap took him 0.236 seconds clear of Charles Leclerc and 0.295 ahead of Lewis Hamilton.

Ruthless BAFC register 16-0 victory

BENGALURU, DHNS: Sohung Pam, MD Shung Pei and Yanaithot scored four goals apiece as a ruthless Bangalore Athletic FC trounced Baseweshvaranagara FC 16-0 in the KSFA D Division League Championship at the Bangalore Football Stadium here on Saturday.

LOCAL FOOTBALL

Results: Bangalore Athletic FC: 16 (Sohung Pam 2nd, 9th, 11th, 13th, Gellong 7th, MD Shung Pei 4th, 27th, 20th, 40th, Yanaithot 10th, 17th, 34th, 43rd, Dhanjit 35th, 43rd, Minlen 37th) bt Baseweshvaranagara FC: 0; Bangalore Saints FC: 2 (Nehal MB 41st, Sharath Kumar HM 45th) bt Rush FC: 1 (Anirudh S 85th); Srirampura Camp Boys FC: 2 (Abhishek A 7th, 40th) bt Sportshood FC: 1 (Korban 20th); Pase FC: 1 (Advik Vinay 14th) bt Karnataka Netwk FC: 0; Majaz FC: 3 (Shawn 18th, Faique 29th, Deepan 33rd) bt FC Revalation: 0; Athlitis FC: 1 (R Sachin 20th) bt BPSS FC: 0; All Star FC: 2 (Deihengnieng 21st, Sanjai 46th) drew with Falcon FC: 2 (Nandush S 9th, A Benner Lara 28th).

From wheels to blades: K'taka's inline hockey kids discover ice hockey

HITA PRAKASH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Entering the Himadri Ice Rink in Dehradun this April, was an anxious moment for coaches Aryan Vijeth and Arun Rawat. The duo, afterall, were carrying the hopes, blind trust and expectations of a skating battalion comprising 70-plus youngsters and their parents from Karnataka.

The kids – all aged under 15 years – were primarily inline hockey players (a team sport wearing skating boots with four wheels aligned one behind the other). But now, awaiting the entire group from a tropical Southern state at the foothills of the snowy Himalayan range was a challenge - to learn how to play ice hockey!

"No! It took about an hour to get adjusted," says Dhanvi Muthuswamy, captain of the Karnataka U-12 girls' team while her boys' counterpart Tanvik Kota adds: "It was not tough to change. Easy. So much fun!"

The 11-year-old Dhanvi and eight-year-old Tanvik aren't just talking about acclimitising to cold weather but switching from wheels to blades (skates), from kota stone to ice (surface), from hot outdoors to cold indoors (stadiums)... all of them during the 10-day camp in Dehradun to prepare for the first-ever junior (U12 & U15) ice hockey nationals scheduled earlier this month. And as the script would have it, both teams came back home with silver medals around their necks last week!

"The way they adapted within a few hours into the development camp in April was incredible," offers 30-year-old Aryan, who is a national-level inline hockey player, founder and coach at the Gunjur Skating Rinks (GSR) near Whitefield and Varthur in Bengaluru. "Yeah, that gave us confidence. Because it was a huge risk. More than the money, we had to respect the time and trust invested by the parents. So the result is very satisfying," points out 24-year-old Arun, a coach at the academy and a national-level player himself who has represented Chandigarh.

The Karnataka under-12 ice hockey boys' (above) and girls' teams pose with their spoils at the nationals in Dehradun.

The unconditional support of the parents – a majority of whom are IT Professionals – was no doubt the backbone of this entire endeavor. With the Ice Hockey Association of Karnataka only coming into existence in January this year, the parents funded both the camp in April and the competition in June. Another significant factor, according to Aryan and Arun, was the support from the Ice Hockey Association of India who appointed international player and coach Ashish Rawat to help the Karnataka team with technical assistance during the 10-day session.

Along with all the collective efforts of the adults, what made the transition smooth for the kids was the fact that the rules, the stick and puck of both inline and ice hockey being similar. At the event that followed international norms for U-12 and U-15 categories, a match was played with three on-field players and a goalkeeper per team on half court and a game lasting for 30 minutes of three 10-minute periods with two-minute breaks at the end of the first and second periods.

Great adapting skillset, enthusiatic mindset and the energy of parents turned out to be the ideal receipe for the under-12 squads finishing as runners-up. On the other hand, the under-15 boys and girls ended in fourth positions - an equally commendable achievement for team Karnataka competing against sides with more exposure and accessibility to ice and snow.

"Everybody displayed a great attitude. We went to Dehradun in April with about 100 players from Karnataka (U12, U15, U18 & seniors) that gave us two medals in June. We understand that inline or ice hockey isn't too popular here. But hopefully, such wins inspire others to take up these sports that leads to the beginning of something new," conclude Aryan and Arun.

Double delight for K'taka's Kaashvi

BENGALURU, DHNS: It was double delight for Karnataka's Kaashvi Venkat, who won both the singles and doubles titles in the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) under-12 tennis tournament in Jaipur on Saturday.

Kaashvi Venkat

The unseeded Kaashvi took the girls' singles title after beating second seed Sejal Jadav of Maharashtra 6-0, 7-5. Kaashvi, partnering Adira Bhagat of Maharashtra, also bagged the doubles crown, defeating Haryana's Swastika S and Uttarakhand's Araina Vishal 6-0, 6-2.

Results: All finals: Singles: Kaashvi Venkat (Kar) bt Sejal Jadav (Mah) 6-0, 7-5. **Doubles:** Kaashvi Venkat (Kar)/Adira Bhagat (Mah) bt Swastika Swastika (HR)/ Araina Vishal (Utk) 6-0, 6-2.

TOUGH TASK The BCCI and selectors' challenge is no longer only finding talent but managing it the best way

Indian cricket's TALENT OVERLOAD

Yashasvi Jaiswal, despite the obvious credentials, hasn't managed to secure his white-ball spot. PTI

MADHU JAWALI
BENGALURU, DHNS

It might seem ironic to talk about India's abundant cricket talent when they have just been humbled by Ireland in a T20 International in Belfast on Friday. It was a stunning result for the hosts, who would now be eyeing a rare T20 series win against India, a feat not many have accomplished in recent years. That said, one defeat, even against so-called minnows, doesn't turn the two-time defending T20 World Cup champions into an average side. If the ongoing FIFA World Cup is of any relevance, then big upsets are common, and that's the beauty of sport.

That's a discussion for another day, but returning to the original topic of the endless Indian cricket supply chain, this has never been more evident than in the last three-four years. As every new IPL edition unearths fresh cricketers, it adds to India's bottomless pool of talent. India has reached a situation where, for every legit player picked in any Indian side (India U-19, India A or India seniors), there will be two-three deserving candidates left out. Happy headache, anyone?

Someone as gifted as Yashasvi Jaiswal hasn't been able to secure his place in any of the white-ball teams; his Rajasthan Royals opening partner Vaibhav Sooryavanshi may. Rishabh Pant has been restricted to Tests now, with his vice-captaincy stripped; the selectors didn't hesitate to axe the T20 World Cup-winning captain Suryakumar Yadav, while his successor, Shreyas Iyer, has been unable to pin down his place in the Test side, despite a great start to his career. Even Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill, a proven T20 batter, was dropped from the squad ahead of the home World Cup earlier this year, while K L Rahul, who can walk into any other national T20I side as a valuable wicketkeeper-batter, hasn't had a sniff of the format with the Indian team since 2022. Pacer Mohammed Siraj keeps wondering why he isn't a preferred choice in white-ball cricket, while Mohammed Shami has no idea why he remains out of the selectors' radar.

While this is the "plight" of established stars, imagine those on the fringe. Manav Suthar, the left-arm spin all-rounder from Rajasthan who claimed seven wickets on his Test debut against Afghanistan earlier this month, may have to wait a while for another match if Ravindra Jadeja returns to the squad. For whatever reasons, Jammu & Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi, with over 100 wickets in the last two Ranji Trophy seasons, wasn't considered worthy enough to even be in the squad against Afghanistan; Karnataka batter Smaran R wasn't picked for the red-ball matches of India A, currently playing Sri Lanka A, despite averaging over 70 after two domestic seasons in first-class cricket.

This scenario throws up a question that is difficult to address to everyone's satisfaction. How does the BCCI manage so much talent? How do selectors go about giving the right player a chance at the right time? Is it just about numbers or something more? How do selectors not let IPL performances colour their judgement?

Former India player and selection committee member Jatin Paranjape feels the most important criterion is whether the player picked aligns with the team management's philosophy, goals and his role.

"The selector, I've always thought, is like the HR person of a company, while the CEO is the team coach and the captain," Jatin tells DHoS. "The team management defines the style of cricket they want to play, which determines the kind of players they need. Selection isn't simply about picking the highest run-scorer or wicket-taker; it's about identifying the gaps in the team and finding the right player to fill them.

Left-arm spinning all-rounder Manav Suthar, with 7 scalps on his debut against Afghanistan, may not get another Test in near future. PTI

"In a team sport, you have to pick players who complement each other. That's how the coach and captain think. The selectors travel across the country, assess the entire talent pool, and identify the best performers who can fill specific roles."

Jatin is also of the view that a selector should be able to judge whether a player fits the team's culture and dressing-room environment.

"Culture is a significant factor," he emphasizes. "While watching matches, I paid close attention to how players reacted after setbacks. If a key player failed, I observed whether he remained engaged, celebrated the team's success and supported his teammates, or mentally switched off. I would even speak to players fielding on the boundary and ask what they would do in a particular situation if they were captain. Some weren't mentally involved in the game, while others showed sharp awareness. Those interactions revealed a lot about a player's mindset."

He agrees, though, that these qualities are difficult to assess, and sometimes selectors get those calls wrong. "It's a challenging and often thankless job."

For years, selectors worried about finding enough quality players to build competitive teams across formats. India now has the opposite problem. There are simply too many good players, which means some deserving names will always miss out.

"Performance, however, must remain the primary criterion," he insists while expressing his surprise over Nabi not being selected in the Test squad and Shami being ignored continuously. "Otherwise, what is the relevance of domestic cricket? If players perform consistently in tournaments like the Ranji Trophy but are overlooked, it sends the wrong message. A player who has done the hard yards in domestic cricket deserves opportunities at the next level. If there are two equally suitable candidates, the one with the stronger domestic record should get the first opportunity."

While underlining the Centre of Excellence's role today as "critical", Jatin says selection is a complex job because multiple stakeholders have to be aligned, and that's perhaps the biggest challenge.

"The Centre of Excellence serves as the supply line," he notes. "If it declares a player fit, selectors should trust that assessment. If it says a player is not ready, that player should not be considered. Today, the Centre of Excellence is more important than ever because of the sheer volume of cricket being played. Its role has evolved from being important to absolutely critical."

For all the debates over selection, this is still a problem most cricketing nations would love to have. The real challenge is no longer finding talented cricketers. It is making sure the best players get the right opportunities and that genuine talent doesn't get lost in the sheer depth of India's player pool.

Jammu and Kashmir's Auqib Nabi, with over 100 Ranji Trophy wickets over the last two seasons, failed to find a place in the squad for the one-off Test against Afghanistan. PTI

ATHLETICS INTER-STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ancy, Sarvesh shine

Kerala athlete erases Anju's 22-year-old long jump national record

ADITYA K HALDER
BHUBANESWAR, DHNS

Long jumper Ancy Sojan (left) couldn't stop her tears after breaking the national record while Sarvesh Kushare is all smiles after becoming the first Indian high jumper to cross the 2.30 metre mark en route to gold in Bhubaneswar on Saturday. DH PHOTOS/ ADITYA K HALDER

In another memorable day in Indian athletics, two long-awaited national records came down as long jumper Ancy Sojan and high jumper Sarvesh Kushare took their game to a new level at the National Inter-State Athletics Championships here on Saturday.

Asian Games silver medallist Ancy, who has been in hot form throughout the season, leapt to a 6.88 metre on a sultry evening to surpass legendary Anju Bobby George's record of 6.83.

Meanwhile, India's leading high jumper Sarvesh Kushare made history by becoming the first Indian to cross 2.30 metre as he obliterated the previous best Indian mark of 2.29 by Tejaswin Shankar.

Both the athletes reset the national records after comfortably going past the Asian Games qualification mark.

Sarvesh was in a league of his own as he cleared the unprecedented mark, while Tamil Nadu's Aadarsh Ram (2.27) and Karnataka's Jesse Sandesh (2.19) joined in to cheer their rival after breaching the Asiad mark.

"This was the result of all the hard work we have done over the last 12 years," said Sarvesh. "I often came close but missed it but today everything fell in place."

Ancy, on the other hand, saw some quality competition in the final as UP's Shaili Singh (6.67) and Lakshwadeep's Mubassina Mohammed (6.53) managed big jumps of their to push their Kerala rival.

25-year-old Ancy, however, managed a splendid series of 6.73, X, 6.67, 6.72, 6.88 and 6.69 to dominate the night.

"I hope Anju ma'am will be proud of what I have achieved today and will support me," said Ancy. "There are so many of the Indian jumpers who are doing well at the moment, I hope we Indians will be considered top quality at the world stage."

Yashas, Sneha qualify

400m hurdler Yashas Palaksha won Karnataka their third gold medal while also breaching the Asian Games qualification mark.

The 24-year-old Tumakuru athlete, who is currently the fastest hurdler in the country, won the men's final in a photo finish with his perennial rival Santhosh T of Tamil Nadu at 49.14 seconds. Yashas also breached the 49.41 qualification time while resetting his own meet record. His state-mate Aryan took the bronze at 50.95.

Sneha SS, meanwhile, also cleared the Asiad mark with 11.65 seconds run that saw her take silver medal behind Maharashtra's Sudeshna Shivankar.

Karnataka medals followed as Karishma Sanil (53.06) took silver in women's javelin while finishing behind reigning Asian Games champion Annu Rani (56.74). However, none could breach the Asiad mark.

Another Karnataka 400m hurdler Sinchal Kaveramma (58.90 seconds) won bronze in the women's final while Tamil Nadu's Nithya Ramraj (56.07) dominated the event to a gold and Asiad qualification.

Results: 100m: Animesh Kujur (Odi) 10.28, 1; Pranav Gurav (Mah) 10.39, 2; Laukik Melge (Mah) 10.43, 3.
400m Hurdles: Yashas Palaksha (Kar) 49.14, 1; Santhosh T (TN) 49.14, 2; Aryan Kashyap (Kar) 50.95, 3.
1500m: Yoonus Shah (Utt) 3:37.55, 1; Gulveer Singh (Utt) 3:38.31, 2; Rahul Baloda (Raj) 3:40.07, 3.
High Jump: Sarvesh Kushare (Mah) 2.31m (NR: Old: 2.29m, Tejaswin Shankar, 2018), 1; Aadarsh Ram (Tam) 2.25m, 2; Jesse Sandesh (Kar) 2.19m, 3.
Shot Put: Karanveer Singh (Pun) 20.49m, 1; Samardeep Gill (Mad) 20.40m, 2; Tajinderpal Toor (Pun) 20.27m, 3.
Women: 100m: Sudeshna Shivankar (Mah) 11.59, 1; Sneha S S (Kar) 11.65, 2; Suba Dharsini S (Tam) 11.71, 3.
400m Hurdles: R Vithya Ramraj (Tam) 56.07, 1; Anu R (Ker) 56.54, 2; Sinchal (Kar) 58.90, 3.
1500m: Parul Chaudhary (Utt) 4:20.45, 1; Ankita (Utt) 4:20.78, 2; Pooja (Har) 4:21.48, 3.
Long Jump: Ancy Sojan E (Ker) 6.88m (NR: Old: 6.83m, Anju Bobby George, 2004), 1; Shaili Singh (Utt) 6.67m, 2; Mubassina Mohammed (Lak) 6.53m, 3.
Javelin Throw: Annu Rani (Utt) 56.74m, 1; Karishma Sanil (Kar) 53.06m, 2; Uma Choudhary (Raj) 53.06m, 3.

Patil, Raju steer Blasters over Yodhas; Mystics beat Warriors

BENGALURU, DHNS: Bengaluru Blasters scored a thrilling seven-wicket victory over Shivamogga Yodhas in the DACSS Maharaja Trophy KSCA T20 tournament on Saturday as the event moved its base from Mysuru to Huballi.

Chasing a challenging 174, the Blasters cruised along easily after opener Rohan Patil laid the foundation for a comfortable chase slamming a 46-ball 62 (5x4, 2x6) adding 65 runs in 7.3 overs for the opening wicket with Bhuvan Mohan Raju (29, 2b, 3x4, 1x6).

In the second match of the day, Gulbarga Mystics pulled off a three-wicket win with seven balls remaining against Mysuru Warriors.

Batting first, Karthikeya KP's 43-ball 63 helped Warriors post 155/7 in 20 overs.

In reply, B R Sharath (49) and Manish Pandey (43 n.o.) led the run chase as Mystics crossed the finish line in 18.5 overs.

Brief scores: Shivamogga Yodhas: 173/6 in 20 overs (Luvnith Sisodia 51, Aneesh KV 29, Smaran R 36; Rohan Raju 3-21) lt to Bengaluru Blasters: 177/3 in 19 overs (Bhuvan Raju 29, Rohan Patil 62, Praveen Dubey 39 n.o.).

Mysuru Warriors: 155/7 in 20 overs (Karthikeya KP 63; Ronit More 2-31) lt to Gulbarga Mystics: 156/7 in 18.5 overs (BR Sharath 49, Manish Pandey 43 n.o.; Ritesh Bhatkal 4-20, Karthikeya KP 2-35).

India seal quarters berth

TOKYO, PTI: Team India sealed their quarterfinals spot in the Badminton Asia Junior Mixed Team Championships with a dominant 2-0 (55-31, 55-21) win over Kazakhstan in their Group C opener at Yatsushiro, here on Saturday.

Devika, Rounak, Srikanth march on in US Open

FULLERTON (US), PTI: Thailand Masters winner Devika Sihag upset third seed Riko Gunji of Japan, while Rounak Chouhan continued his dream run to reach the semi-finals of the US Open badminton tournament.

Devika kept her nerves in the business end of both the games to beat Gunji 22-20, 21-19 in the women's singles quarterfinals, while Chouhan defeated Israel's Misha Zilberman 23-21, 21-11 in just 38 minutes to reach his first men's singles BWF World Tour Super 300 semifinal, here on Friday.

Devika Sihag

Later in the day, former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth packed off Liao Jhuo-Fu of Chinese Taipei 21-9, 12-21, 21-8 in the other quarterfinals to raise hopes of an all-India final on Sunday.

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PERSONAL

Change of Name

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **PINTU SINGH R**, residing at No. 2A, 8 A Main, Vijaya Bank Layout. Bilekahalli, Bangalore -560076, My minor son name is **SAMAKSH** (old name), Now we are changing his name to **SAMAKSH RAJPUROHIT** (new name) for all official purposes in future. On behalf of my minor son I sworn before advocate and notary G.Dayananda, Bangalore. vide affidavit dt: 27/06/2026.

CONNECT

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CHANGE OF NAME
I, **SURIYA BANU** Residing at No. 23, 2nd Floor, 6th 'D' Main Road, Appanna Block, Kauser Nagar, R.T. Nagar,, Bengaluru-560032 have changed my name to **SURIYA BANO** vide affidavit dated 27.06.2026 before Notary K.G. Rajpal Bengaluru. Henceforth I shall be known as **SURIYA BANO** only.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **RAGHUKUL SAI KADIRI RAJENDRA KUMAR GARI,** S/o Rajendra Kumar Kadiri Lakshmana Moorthy Gari, R/at # 997, Sripaada, 17th Main, 7th Cross, BTM Layout 2nd Stage, Bengaluru-76, have changed my name to **RAGHUKUL SAI KADIRI RAJENDRA KUMAR** vide affidavit dated 27-06-2026, sworn before notary B.M. Chandrashekar, Bengaluru.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **SHAIK SHAKEEL AHMED** Residing at No. 23, 2nd Floor, 6th 'D' Main Road, Appanna Block, Kauser Nagar, R.T. Nagar, Bengaluru-560032 have changed my name to **SYED SHAKEEL AHMED** vide affidavit dated 27.06.2026 before Notary K.G. Rajpal Bengaluru. Henceforth I shall be known as **SYED SHAKEEL AHMED** only.

WE, MANIHALLA Yogish Pai & Preethi Kamath, residing at Bengaluru, have changed the name of our minor child aged 10 years, from Khushi Yogish Pai to Veera Yogish Pai vide affidavit dated 18/06/2026. Henceforth, the child shall be known as Veera Yogish Pai for all purposes.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, **I AROCKYAMARY,** residing at # 3, 1st Floor, Bazaar Street, Gowthamapuram, Ulsoor, Bengaluru - 560008, have changed my name to **AROCKYA MARY** vide affidavit dated 27-06-2026, sworn before notary Gangaraju BN., Bengaluru. Henceforth I shall be called as **AROCKYA MARY** only.

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Defending digital India: Why technology alone will not protect us

EMPIRE OF THE MIND

Gurucharan Gollerkeri
The former civil servant enjoys traversing the myriad spaces of ideas, thinkers, and books

India's digital transformation has been one of its great public policy successes. Aadhaar, UPI, digital governance platforms and the digitisation of banking, education, healthcare, and commerce have created an ecosystem of unprecedented scale that is now integral to India's economic and social life. Yet, the very success of this digital revolution has created a new strategic vulnerability.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report identifies cybersecurity as one of the most immediate and significant risks facing India. Cyber-attacks are no longer isolated incidents; they represent a systemic threat to economic stability, national security, and public trust. India's digital infrastructure has outpaced the capabilities needed to secure it. The numbers are striking. Industry reports indicate millions of cyber-attack attempts against Indian systems annually, and CERT-In has reported handling large numbers of cyber incidents.

Education, healthcare, manufacturing, financial services, and government institutions have emerged as targets. More concerning is the changing nature of the threat. Cyber-attacks are no longer the work of isolated hackers seeking notoriety. They are increasingly conducted by criminal enterprises, state-sponsored groups, and organised networks. Ransomware groups have evolved into agile, distributed operations capable of attacking entire supply chains.

In an earlier era, a disruption of physical infrastructure required military force. Today, a well-executed cyber operation can potentially disrupt financial transactions, interrupt electricity supply, compromise government databases, or undermine confidence in digital institutions. Cybersecurity has therefore become not merely an IT concern but a matter of national resilience. Just as nations invest in military academies to prepare for conventional threats, they must now invest in cyber academies to prepare for conflicts in the digital domain. The Government of India has recognised the challenge through increased investments, an expanded role for CERT-In, stronger sectoral frameworks, and initiatives such as the Financial Fraud Risk Indicator and the national cyber fraud helpline. These initiatives are necessary and commendable.

However, a critical question that receives insufficient attention is: who will operate, manage, and continuously improve these defensive systems? Technology can be purchased. Human expertise cannot. India today faces a significant shortage of highly skilled cybersecurity professionals. While many institutions offer cybersecurity courses, most focus on theory, compliance or basic network administration. What is urgently needed is advanced, specialised training capable of producing professionals who can operate at the highest levels of cyber defence.

The cybersecurity workforce required by India over the next decade cannot consist solely of security analysts monitoring dashboards. The country needs cyber threat hunters, digital forensics experts, industrial control systems specialists, cloud security architects, cyber intelligence analysts, cryptography experts, and specialists capable of defending critical infrastructure against state-sponsored attacks. Such expertise requires cyber ranges, live attack simulations, advanced laboratories, and collaboration with defence organisations, intelligence agencies, technology companies, and critical infrastructure operators. It also requires continuous upskilling because the threat landscape evolves faster than traditional curricula.

This is where policy must shift from awareness to capability building. What might such a capability-building agenda look like? First, India should establish a National Cyber Workforce Mission on the lines of the Skill India and Digital India initiatives. The objective should be to create a pipeline of cybersecurity professionals at multiple levels: from technicians and SOC analysts to elite cyber operators capable of defending critical infrastructure. The mission should bring together government, industry, universities, defence establishments, and technology firms for training, certification and deployment.

India needs a network of advanced cybersecurity academies equipped with cyber ranges, digital forensics laboratories, malware analysis centres, and simulated critical infrastructure environments. These academies should provide specialised programmes for defence, law enforcement, public-sector, and critical infrastructure personnel. Their purpose should not merely be education but the creation of operational readiness.

Several practical measures can be undertaken immediately. Critical infrastructure operators should be required to conduct annual cyber resilience exercises and independent red-team assessments. Sector-specific Cyber Security Operations Centres should be established for power, healthcare, transportation, and manufacturing.

Universities should introduce interdisciplinary cybersecurity programmes combining computer science, law, public policy, and intelligence studies. A national cyber scholarship programme should support talented students entering specialised fields such as cryptography, digital forensics, and AI security. Structured public-private threat intelligence-sharing mechanisms should be institutionalised to enable faster detection and response to emerging threats.

India's digital economy is expected to become one of the largest in the world. Our aspirations in AI, semiconductor manufacturing, defence technology, and digital public infrastructure depend on trust in digital systems. That trust cannot be maintained through software alone. The question before India is not whether cyber-attacks will occur, but whether we will possess the institutional capacity and specialised talent required to anticipate, withstand, and recover from them.

India has demonstrated its ability to build world-class digital infrastructure. The next national mission must be to build world-class cyber defenders.

POORVA PAKSHA

Nothing is delivered

Bob Dylan's 1967 song from *The Basement Tapes, 'Nothing Was Delivered'*, is a classic American folk parable, falling somewhere between a prophecy and a joke. Someone was promised something. Someone waited. Nothing came. Isn't that more or less the entire economic, ecological, and psychic condition of Gen Z today?

'Nothing was delivered/ And I tell this truth to you/ Not out of spite or anger/ But simply because it's true'.

For those who haven't yet heard, there is a South Korean website called FoodNeverComes. It looks and behaves exactly like a food-delivery app. You browse dishes, add them to your cart, proceed to checkout, and track a rider as he approaches your doorstep. The familiar theatre of anticipation: the icon moving, the countdown shrinking, the delicious illusion of imminence. But no money is charged. No kitchen is alerted. No food arrives. Nothing gets delivered. That is the point.

Adults are aghast, yet again, at the depths of absurdity that Gen Z turns to. But I disagree completely. I don't see FoodNeverComes as a fake delivery simulator. I see it as a training module for the future, preparing the young for a world in which the forms of satisfaction remain while the substance disappears. The button remains. The tracking map remains. The dopamine hit remains. What vanishes is the food, the wage, the house, the secure job, the stable climate, the plausible adulthood. Our generation promised them a lot. Nothing will be delivered.

These platforms are called "dopamine sites", digital spaces that simulate rewarding behaviours without real-world consumption. A fake shopping site lets you fill a cart without buying. A fake smoking-break site lets you take a cigarette break without a cigarette. The apparatus of desire is preserved; the object of desire is removed. This is supposed to be the therapeutic part.

One can see the appeal. A 25-year-old, hungry at 2 am and trying not to waste half a day's wages on noodles, opens the site, clicks, tracks, waits, and somehow feels relieved. It is pathetic to us adults only if we pretend that the real delivery economy is better. But what is so noble about the "real" version? A hungry worker summons another hungry worker, through an app owned by investors, to deliver overpriced food cooked by underpaid labour, while all parties are algorithmically monitored and none is happy. The real transaction is already a simulation of abundance built on scarcity. FoodNeverComes merely removes the food and, in doing so, accidentally reveals the truth.

Aakash Singh Rathore
as Dr Jekyll is a Professor of Philosophy, Politics and Law, author and editor of over 20 books and counting, and as Mr Hyde, one of India's top-ranking Ironman triathletes

@ASR_metta

'Now you must provide some answers/ For what you sell has not been received'.

The hunger was never only for food. It was for agency; for the tiny sovereignty of saying: I want this, and therefore I shall have it. As young people lose control over the major architecture of their lives, consumer choice is the last toy kingdom left to them. You may not be able to buy a house, breathe clean air, or retire. But you can choose between biryani, ramen, shawarma, and molten chocolate cake at 1:37 am.

This is why FoodNeverComes feels less like a novelty than a parable. It belongs to a generation that was promised education as mobility; they inherited it as debt. They were promised the internet as liberation; they inherited surveillance, addiction, and the monetisation of hate. They were promised meritocracy; they met entry-level positions demanding three years of experience and gratitude for exploitation.

So, what is Gen Z asked to do? Work harder for jobs that may not exist. Study longer for professions that may be automated. Save in economies designed to extract. Build lives on a planet whose weather is deranged. Stay optimistic while doomscrolling through ecological collapse, war footage, rent inflation, and billionaires discussing Mars as though Earth were an old gf they plan to ghost. Under these circumstances, FoodNeverComes is not escapism, but realism.

Still, there is something oddly hopeful in its absurdity. The joke knows it is a joke. It does not confuse simulation with nourishment. The website states plain and clear what most institutions conceal: "this will not feed you". The fake app is more truthful than the real economy. It does not take your money. It does not pretend to love you. It says: here is the ritual, here is the craving, here is the little hit, here is the nothing at the end.

'Nothing was delivered/ But I can't say I sympathise/ With what your fate is going to be'...

SALT & PEP

Cred, credibility and WhatsApp

The week gone by in India's start-up circles was a Kunal Shah week. Cred, described best as "a members-only club that rewards individuals for their timely credit card bill payments", had a big new investor. Meta decided on a strong investment of $900 million, valuing the enterprise at $4.5 billion post-money. Overnight, Cred had grown to be the equivalent of four and a half unicorns rolled into one, and the Shah at Cred was to become the BadShah at WhatsApp. Overnight.

As India woke up to the news, many people wondered what it was all about. Bengaluru in particular was abuzz. Twelve years ago, Facebook bought WhatsApp at a then-whopping valuation of $19 billion. Now, Meta – the mass-driven messaging company from Menlo Park – is biting into a fifth of this Bengaluru-based, very-niche financial services startup. What is this investment all about?

There sure must be a method to the madness. And there is. Mark Zuckerberg places a chunk of investment into Cred, and in return, he gets a fifth of Cred and its future-play upside. More importantly, he gets 100% of the time and energy of Kunal Shah. For me, this investment is more about Shah's mind and mettle than the pure-play business of Cred. Sorry, Cred.

Meta today sits on a global empire of direct WhatsApp consumers. Three billion people worldwide use WhatsApp every day. It's an integral part of my life. My fishmonger puts up his fresh arrivals on my WhatsApp group; the boards I sit on have confidential groups I can't do without. I possibly spend more time with my WhatsApp than I do with my wife. I feel lost when the app is down. I monetise it to my advantage every single day. But does it monetise me?

That is the question at hand at Meta.

Harish Bijoor
is an ambassador of brands and a corporate keynote speaker with more than 18,000+ hours to date

@harishbijoor

How does one monetise this large reach that no other product in recent decades has achieved? WhatsApp is more than a product today. It's a life- and business-enhancing tool. It's not even a tool; it's a chemistry that has established itself with its set of users. It's a member of the families of its users. How does one make money out of this chemistry without hurting the one element that defines a brand: trust?

Over the years, Meta has experimented with many monetisation initiatives, but none have achieved the scale Zuckerberg desires. WhatsApp touches all, but monetises a wee bit of a fraction of all that it touches. And that, surely, is the task cut out for Shah, the startup guy from Bengaluru. The North-South trade has a new definition today. While Menlo Park is WhatsApp's production capital, India – with about 850 million users – is quite likely to be its consumption capital.

Shah brings in a mindset that grapples with scale. But Cred caters to the creamy layer of customers in the financial services market. The mass game is different – a game Shah needs to learn. He will also bring in the ability to harness AI into the seamless deployment of WhatsApp-Next. The platform now needs to be ahead of the curve of consumer wants and needs.

All of us recognise this mandate, but there is a niggling worry. WhatsApp, as we know it, is a trust. Messages are encrypted; consumer data is sacrosanct. How would the anarchy of monetisation play out in a democracy of trust? What's going to trample what? Users of Cred may have similar questions. How is my data going to be used? Even as Meta and Cred say Meta will not have access to Cred's customer data (which many a marketer would kill for), the doubts will linger. In these doubts lie the emerging scars on these two brands in this marriage of sorts.

And then, there are the perceptions: WhatsApp is seen as universal and democratic, covering every segment of society; Cred is perceived as among those niche entities operating at the top of the pyramid. How does one reconcile the difference? In a sense, a balance may emerge in a WhatsApp variant that resembles Cred, or even PayTM or PhonePe. Shah's brief is going to be simple: Don't touch WhatsApp's trust metrics, but make it make money. Lots of money.

At the end of it all, this is a soft-power win for both Meta and India. I think Meta bought into Kunal Shah (and his "builder mentality") more than into Cred (and its 17 million monthly active users whose data it can't touch). This was the only way to do it. And Zuckerberg did just that. Touché!

OUTSIDE

At home in the studio

For those like me, who grew up in places where we were conditioned to presume that a 'studio' meant wearing one's best clothes and standing with open eyes before a camera, it's a mild surprise to discover that the word 'studio' derives from 'study'. Study, both noun and verb, from the Latin *studium*, eagerness, and *studere*, to study. Since I've been trying to delineate the concept of the outside in this column, I wanted to understand how something that was related to the nerves of the inside, both zeal and studying, had gradually been pushed outwards and then brought back in, a bit like a coin in a piggy bank, banished, then summoned for worldly duty. Before it moved to the English language, the Italian understanding of 'studio' was a place of intellectual labour; it was also used, almost interchangeably, with a university. The English language – the first record of its use is around 1800 – adopted the word and gave it air and light, and, uncharacteristic of the English, some playfulness.

It's a journey that's as interesting as the art that begins to come out it. The artist begins to liberate the studio from the dank burden of the scholastic; its amoebic form indulges the experimental. The studio acquires the nature of a canvas itself. Picasso, whose photographs of working in his studio are almost as well-circulated as his paintings, would say, 'When I enter the studio, I leave my body at the door... and I only allow my spirit to go in there and paint'.

This model of the studio, as a near-transcendental space, where the body is almost unnecessary, has its opposite in the kind of studio that Paul Klee – Picasso's contemporary – created. It was an unexpected thing, even more unexpected than Monet's flower and water gardens in Giverny, which were both muse and studio for the French artist. Klee's studio was an extension of his art itself – quiet, half-laboratory, half-greenhouse, where fresh and dried plants, bones and minerals, stones and seashells lived together, unseparated by the boundaries of life and death. They seemed related, even though they were not ordered by any visible logic. The only sign of orderliness was the demarcation between the 'black wall', where he painted, and the 'white wall', where his work was exhibited.

Sumana Roy
is an author and poet. Her books include *How I Became a Tree* and *Provincials*

I like this blur between outside and inside, and am prone to thinking of every house as a possible studio. The distinction between the studio as workshop and the home as studio does not exist for many, particularly for women. I know, from my life, that I might have never been able to write had I needed to go to a café or an office space. The outside sneaks and slides and swims into my writing, but it doesn't happen during visiting hours – writing doesn't come to many of us from booking an appointment. The truth is that I will not be able to write if I could not access the interiority of the domestic space as my studio.

I remember Sandeep Dutta, the founder of the Bangla Little Magazine Library, sitting in a tiny room in his house in 18/M Tamer Lane, off Kolkata's College Street. Surrounded by little magazines that he had collected and salvaged since 1978, when he saw them being discarded by Calcutta's National Library, he sat behind a table on which were arranged the most interesting artefacts. Tiny pieces of clay sculpture, essentially formless but purporting to have form, they might as well have been born as ruins. Pens and pencils, most of which looked like they had not been used since the time of Bankim Chandra; ashtrays, a couple, the ash collected in them like a miniature Stonehenge; receipts, of donation and subscription; grocery bill, a miniature clay LPG cylinder that has been temporarily assigned the role of a paperweight... And the most eccentric of them all – peanut shells, cracked open, collected into a tiny pile, a mound of beautiful corpses, if such a thing was possible.

This was his library, his writing room, his editorial desk; the tea for me came from a room behind him, and behind me was the largesse of College Street. In this little room, which John Donne might have called an 'everywhere', the world had assembled, and the world had been kept away. There, in the afternoon darkness of closed wooden windows and a somnambulist fan, history, always tropical, gathered like a vapour, melding outside and inside.

ROVING REFLECTIONS

Dharma dilemma: The temple as a mirror of the self

Capt G R Gopinath (Retd.)
builds bridges, sometimes by tearing down walls. He is a soldier, farmer, and entrepreneur

Reports of alleged irregularities in the administration of the Ayodhya temple dedicated to Rama, at one level, belong to the familiar archive of institutional scandal. What makes them linger is not the detail, but the irony they evoke. Here is a space built around one of the most enduring symbols of moral order in the Indian imagination. Yet, like all human institutions, it appears vulnerable to the very forces it symbolically stands against. The discomfort is not only about wrongdoing. It is about expectation. Why do we instinctively expect that a temple associated with Rama should be different? And what does that expectation reveal about how we imagine *dharma* itself?

To think through this, it helps to enter the narrative worlds of the Greek and Indian epics, where human life is staged as a negotiation between desire and restraint, power and duty, fate and choice. In *The Iliad,* conflict is not disruption but the condition of existence. Honour is pursued, desire becomes war, and human life is consumed by pride and fate. In *The Odyssey*, the struggle turns inward. The question is no longer conquest but return: whether identity and home can survive time, temptation, and loss.

The Indian epics shift the moral grammar again. In the *Ramayana, dharma* appears, at first glance, as a clear moral binary. It is embodied in Rama – king, exile, husband, compassionate ruler – an ideal of restraint and moral clarity. Against him stands Ravana, not merely as antagonist but as a reminder that learning, power, and devotion can still collapse under lust and ego. Here, the moral world feels sharply defined. *Dharma* is violated, then restored. *Dharma* triumphs over *adharma.*

The *Mahabharata* refuses that clarity. Its world is populated by figures who carry both the righteous and the wicked within themselves. Yudhishthira is devoted to truth, yet makes ruinous choices. Arjuna is paralysed by moral doubt. Krishna guides but also unsettles the very categories through which judgment is made. Bhishma, Drona, and Karna are bound by vows and loyalties that repeatedly outweigh their fealty to *dharma.*

Here, *dharma* is never absent. It must be interpreted, argued over, and chosen under conditions where every option carries ethical cost. This world feels less mythic than recognisable: where good people fail, compromised choices become necessary, and virtue and harm often coexist within the same act.

Within these epics, women are moral pressure points through whom ethical order is exposed rather than described. Sita becomes the site where purity, endurance, and injustice are tested. Draupadi becomes the voice that exposes the collapse of restraint in a royal court. In the Greek imagination, Helen of Troy becomes the pivot around which love turns into catastrophe.

Across these narratives, societies reveal their moral condition not through declarations of virtue but through how individuals behave when they are tempted – and how institutions respond when restraint weakens. This brings us back to the present.

It is tempting to treat a scandal involving a sacred institution as a contradiction between ideal and reality, as though the ideal remains intact while reality alone has failed. But the epics suggest something more unsettling. Institutions do not stand outside human nature. They express it, extend it, and often amplify it.

Temples, courts, kingdoms, and households are arenas where ambition, greed, desire, fear, loyalty, and silence operate simultaneously. Even in the most *dharmic* settings, failure is a recurring possibility. The question, then, is not why a temple associated with Rama should be free of moral failure. The question is why we ever assumed any human structure could be.

Perhaps *Rama Rajya* is not the promise of a world without failure, but the insistence that failure must never become normal – that *dharma* must remain a question repeatedly asked, not a condition permanently secured through sacred form.

As Rabindranath Tagore observed, "While God waits for His temple to be built of love, men bring stones."

Seen this way, the irony is not that human conduct can taint sacred spaces. The deeper irony is that sacredness exists precisely because human conduct is never guaranteed to remain pure. The temple, then, is not itself a contradiction of *dharma*. It is its most revealing mirror, reminding us that no one stands beyond transgression. It reflects not only what we worship but also what we are capable of forgetting. Perhaps that is the most unsettling truth: the gap between ideal and reality is not a flaw to set aside but a tension to confront and correct constantly.

Every institution, finally, is less a monument to perfection than a question addressed to those who enter it: What kind of responsibility does your power carry – and what kind of silence does your comfort permit? The answer, as the epics remind us, is never fully settled.

DECCAN HERALD
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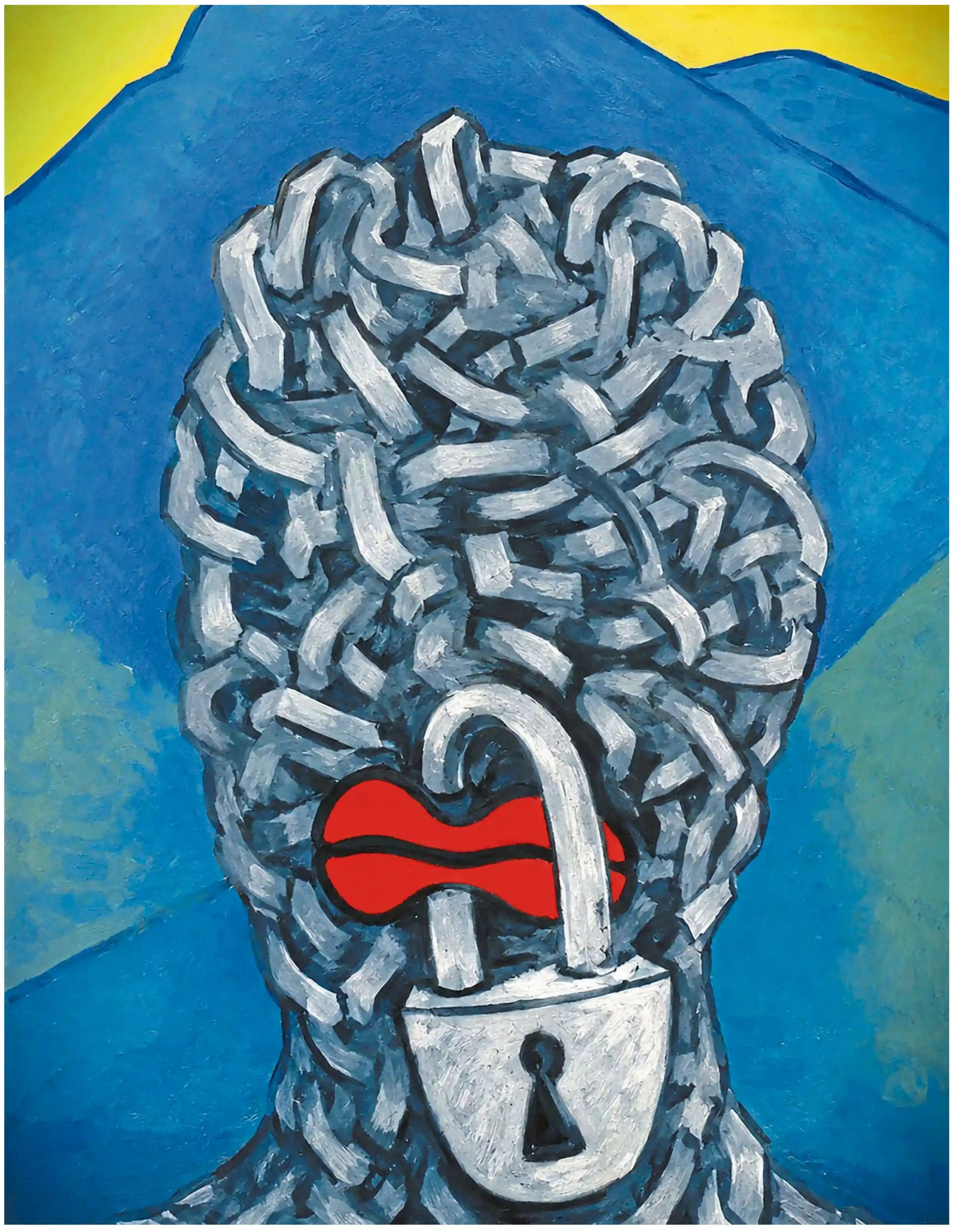
The scars we don't name

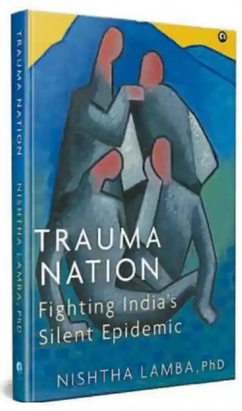
Psychological trauma represents an unacknowledged public health emergency in India. Operating beneath the surface, it erodes personal well-being and community structures, frequently manifesting as physical illness, substance dependence, and severe mood disorders. But there's a way out, writes Nishtha Lamba



Trauma has always been a mysterious word. Even researchers do not agree on one definition. For many, it is an extreme, shocking, life-threatening event. Something that takes years, even a lifetime, to recover from. But this is a very narrow understanding of a far more complex experience that is deeply embedded in the inner architecture of our being.

There is also a generational difference in how we understand the word 'trauma'. Older generations were mostly denied the time to process it; millennials lacked the freedom to acknowledge it; and Gen Z is supposedly seen as using it too casually. While there are varied reasons for these differences, having the language to describe mental health has allowed younger generations to express their experiences more often and more openly.

What concerns me is this. People often disqualify their own deep-seated suffering because they believe that trauma must be something much bigger, much more horrific. Mental health terminologies are there to serve us, to give us a lens through which we understand our emotions; they are not there to curtail or invalidate our feelings. The slow erosion of mental and physical health due to chronic stress, which takes the shape of trauma, is being dismissed or misunderstood. This is what compels me to demystify trauma.



Trauma is an unhealed psychological wound — a deep-seated, unresolved emotional reaction to disruptive experiences. It could be the feeling of having felt unseen in childhood, years of conflict in a relationship, the loss of a loved one, or abuse that is now a hazy, confusing memory. Or it could be an accumulation of all of it, over time. Trauma can lie dormant within us for years, only to be triggered by a later experience. A seemingly familiar touch could suddenly trigger memories of a 'wrong' touch, making people experience the trauma all over again.

Many faces

The definition of trauma is broad precisely because it has many faces. Two people go through the same tragedy and emerge from it differently. Trauma is not what happens to us; it is what happens within us. We need to shift the focus from the event to the impact of the event.

Consider Samay. After a difficult divorce, Samay is required to pay alimony and sees his son only on weekends. In one version of this story, he finds some support — therapy he can afford, a few close friends and parents who stand by him, meaningful time with his son, and yoga in his routine that helps him cope. Over time, he begins to heal what was broken. In the second version, Samay faces blame at home, financial strain, and a growing bitterness from his child. He withdraws from friends and social settings, not wanting to revisit his separation every time. Both scenarios are the same on paper: divorce. However, the situation around the event and the aftermath of it are what eventually define whether Samay develops symptoms of trauma.

Pain is in the details

As human beings, we are wired to adapt and survive. So, the more important question is often not what happened, but why it did not heal. Resilience is our ability to adapt to stress. It should not always be seen as a pedestal we all strive for; rather, it should be seen as a default setting, a baseline. Trauma thrives when we run out of tools for resilience. When we have stable relationships, a sense of purpose, manageable health, and early experiences of love in childhood, we are more likely to recover from trauma. When we adapt, we begin to survive. When we accept, we begin to heal.

After a traumatic event, initial reactions such as withdrawal and emotional shutdown protect us from a flood of overwhelming emotions. But over time, if we do not process, adapt, and accept, trauma begins to take root in our biology, turning initial protection into a mental and physical invasion. A traumatic event heightens the survival part of the brain, known as the limbic system, and suppresses the more evolved part of our brain, known as the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for higher-order thinking and planning. When we continue to relive the trauma beyond the traumatic event, we become extremely sensitive to fear in the environment, startled or numbed easily, and often mistrustful of the world around us.

The link to illness

Unresolved trauma is deeply linked to several mental and physical illnesses. It leads to premature ageing, corroding us from the inside — panic disorders, addictions, eating disorders, persistent depression, to name a few. It suppresses our immune system, disrupts the release of the hormone cortisol (commonly known as the stress hormone), and leads to inflammation in and around our vital organs. If unaddressed for long, trauma can cause our own cells to turn against us, leading to autoimmune diseases, such as lupus, diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, multiple sclerosis, or rheumatoid arthritis. We are unfortunately unable to turn the clock back when that happens.

Beyond our bodies, trauma takes root in our lives and within our relationships. First, through normalisation. We usually let it scream through our ordinary life in the background as we go about our day. Let's visualise this statistically. According to a 2007 pan-India study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, around 66% of children experience physical abuse, while more than half experience sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–21, one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in her lifetime. A study published in the Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine found that 31% of transgender people in India die by suicide, while 50% have attempted suicide at least once before the age of 20. This is a glimpse into vulnerable lives — children, women, and minorities. We have normalised trauma in our collective psyche in India. Second, trauma perpetuates in invisibility. It remains unspoken — in language, in emotion, and in relationships. This happens more in cultures like ours, in India. Because of stigma and our need to live by unrealistic social expectations, we don't communicate or address trauma. When we dismiss the very existence of trauma, it becomes impossible to resolve it.

Chaotic healing

We also tend to conflate trauma with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Trauma can arise from a single event, repeated experiences, childhood adversity, or vicarious exposure to other people's trauma. PTSD, however, is a clinical diagnosis with specific symptoms. It is called a stress disorder because living under the weight of unprocessed chronic stress can take the shape of trauma. One feels like a tenant in their own body, feels constantly on edge or emotionally numb, re-lives a trauma as flashbacks, develop triggers such that a certain sound, smell, or thought related to a traumatic event sets off an alarm in the mind and body. And so, one may avoid or run away from people, places, situations, or things that remind them of the trauma, gradually shrinking their world.

If trauma shapes how we suffer, healing shapes how we return to ourselves.

More often, healing is chaotic and messy. Healing teaches us to live with our past peacefully, without letting it write our story for us. The goal of healing is to ensure that everyday stressors and trauma-related thoughts do not drag us back into old, unresolved patterns.

In many cases, healing requires us to recognise patterns rooted in early experiences. As children, we lack the capacity to make sense of adversity. Yet those experiences do not disappear; they settle into our nervous system, shaping how we think, feel, and relate to others. No two people heal the same way. Even within our own lives, what works in one phase may not work in another. Finding a suitable approach is part of the healing journey, and we rarely get it right the first time. This is why healing often requires us to explore both mind-based and body-based approaches, and sometimes combining the two.

Mind-based approaches include different forms of talk therapy. Trauma-informed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Psychodynamic Therapy help us reframe negative emotions with the guidance of an expert. For instance, CBT may help someone who experienced childhood sexual abuse shift from thinking, "It was my fault," to "I was powerless in that situation; the responsibility lies with the adult who harmed me."

There are other evidence-based practices individuals can adopt. Expressive writing — spending 15–20 minutes over a few days writing freely about one's experiences, without censoring, can help process difficult emotions. Mindfulness, where we pay attention to the present moment, even for a few minutes a day, can calm the nervous system by grounding us in the here and now. It helps us regulate our emotions better. Research has also shown that meditation, breathing techniques, and yoga, deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions and now widely embraced in the West, are extremely beneficial for trauma survivors with overwhelmed minds and bodies.

Nishtha Lamba

Creativity balm

Creative expression is another powerful but often overlooked healing approach. As adults burdened with the pressures of daily life, we forget the value of joy and meaning. Creative arts invite us back into that space. Dance, painting, and drama have all been studied and shown to foster a sense of belonging, restore self-worth, and help reclaim a sense of safety in a world that once felt unsafe. And psychoeducation — learning how suffering and strength shape us internally — helps us build the narratives we need to make sense of difficult life experiences. In fact, reading this article is a form of psychoeducation!

It is also important to recognise that talk therapy alone may not be enough. Trauma can disorganise memory and embed itself in the body, which means that talking can only take us so far. In some cases, a psychiatrist, after assessment, may recommend psychotropic drugs to help individuals cope better. These should not be prescribed casually and are generally used when symptoms are severe and significantly interfere with daily functioning.

One way to understand whether healing interventions are actually helping is by observing the nervous system. Are we constantly reactive, or do we tend to shut down completely? How long does it take to return to a state of calm after being triggered by a negative event or thought? These are important markers. Another approach is to pay close attention to your inner dialogue. If self-critical thoughts persist like mild chronic suffering, it may indicate that the mind is stuck in unhealthy loops. In trauma-related contexts, thoughts such as "Why did this happen to me?" or "Could I have stopped it?" can be deeply disturbing. Similarly, the presence of intrusive thoughts — sudden, unwanted memories or images — may suggest that healing approaches are not helping as much.

Sometimes, recognising trauma may demand a radical shift in how we live. Many survivors eventually speak of a renewed love for life — not because the past disappears, but because it no longer dictates them. That is what it means to have a meaningful healing journey.

The author holds a PhD and MPhil in Psychology from the University of Cambridge and is an associate professor of Psychology at Middlesex University Dubai. Her book Trauma Nation: Fighting India's Silent Epidemic was recently released by Aleph.

The Correspondent is to fiction what 84, Charing Cross Road was to non-fiction readers of a certain vintage and a deserving winner of the Women's Prize for Fiction, writes Sudipta Datta

Pieces of a magnificent puzzle

Virginia Evans' epistolary novel about an ageing protagonist who spurns the digital world and writes letters instead has charmed readers and critics alike.

THE CORRESPONDENT
Virginia Evans
Penguin,
pp 288, Rs 899

In the time of 30-second reels and doom-scrolling, Virginia Evans' epistolary novel about an ageing protagonist who spurns the digital world has charmed readers and critics alike. With mostly word-of-mouth publicity, Evans' debut novel, The Correspondent, published last year, has sold millions of copies and won the Women's Prize for Fiction 2026.

Sybil Van Antwerp is a 73-year-old mother and grandmother, divorced, who, after retiring from a distinguished career in law, has taken up correspondence as her "manner of living." On her table in her home at Annapolis in Maryland are her favoured tools: fountain pens, a stack of writing papers, and stamps.

The letters begin in 2012, and the first one is to her gay brother Felix, who lives in France. She gifts her brother a box of Smythson letter writing paper, envelopes, and a fountain pen. "This is the way I will prevent you from ever moving our ongoing exchange to e-mail," she writes.

Sybil peels layers from her life bit by bit, and readers are provided a peek into her past and present — the grief she carries, the illness that will overwhelm her one day, other markers of growing old like arthritis, her relationships with her sibling, friends, children, and how she is wooed by two suitors.

We realise early on that Sybil will possibly lean on Theodore Lübeck, a thoughtful neighbour who leaves white roses from his garden on the porch for her birthday and cookies for Christmas. As Sybil's best friend, Rosalie, tells her, "God, doesn't Mr Lübeck sound like the most wonderful man?"

The compulsive letter writer — Sybil has been at it since she was nine years old, dashing off a missive to P L Travers about her Mary Poppins series, among others — pens one to Ann Patchett, the writer and owner of Parnassus Books. Patchett has since hosted Evans at her famous bookshop in Nashville.

Sybil also connects with Joan Didion, over her grief memoirs Blue Nights and The Year of Magical Thinking, and explains why her work haunts Sybil. Didion, too, looks forward to hearing from Sybil, saying her thoughts on life and grief have meant a great deal to her. Sybil's long life is marked by love and loss, and many ups and downs. Adopted at 14 months, Sybil struggles to understand why someone would give up a baby — it's a bruise she carries with her, but there's a bigger tragedy she has had to live with.

The most heartfelt letters are for Harry Landy, the troubled son of Judge James Landy, in which she opens up about her own challenges, even as she is a keen listener about his own hardships as he navigates his world. In one letter, Sybil tells him about her childhood. She was a watchful, wary girl, a sceptic, and didn't have many friends. But she read a great deal. "I was reading all the time. I remember that. And I wrote a great many letters as a child. Writing letters was easier for me than speaking; it still is."

Musing on a life of writing letters, Sybil says it's a magical art: "Imagine, the letters one has sent out into the world, the letters received back in turn, are like the pieces of a magnificent puzzle, or, a better metaphor, if dated, the links of a long chain, and even if those links are never put back together, which they will certainly never be, even if they remain for the rest of time dispersed across the earth like the fragile blown seeds of a dying dandelion, isn't there something wonderful in that, to think that a story of one's life is preserved in some way, that this very letter may one day mean something, even if it is a very small thing, to someone?"

The Correspondent is to fiction for the contemporary age what 84, Charing Cross Road, first published in 1970, was to non-fiction readers of a certain vintage. That was the delightful true story of a correspondence an American reader, Helene Hanff, had with an antique book seller in London over 20 years. Many readers have remarked how Sybil's words have prompted them to rethink how they communicate and try to reset their need to depend only on digital crutches, the best conversation any book can hope for. 84, Charing Cross Road was adapted into plays and a film; The Correspondent, too, is getting a film makeover.

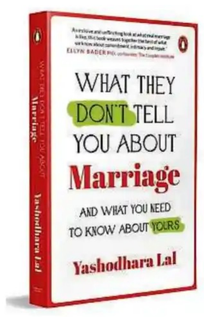
The reviewer is a senior journalist based in Kolkata.

Saints or villains? No, just couples

Yashodhara Lal writes with warmth and clarity about what long relationships demand once ceremony, fantasy and social performance fall away, says Srinath Sridharan

Is your marriage passing through that unglamorous stretch where companionship begins to feel heavier than romance? Are the familiar quarrels over money, parents, sex, chores or silence really about the issue at hand, or about older hurts and unmet expectations? And if love was enough to bring two people together, why does living together so often make them puzzle over each other? Yashodhara Lal's What They Don't Tell You About Marriage steps into this intimate, difficult terrain with uncommon candour, arguing that the true labour of marriage begins not at the wedding, but right after.

In India, where marriage is still wrapped in ceremony, family expectation and social performance, Lal does something quietly radical: she treats it neither as a sacred destiny nor as a failed romance, but as a long human apprenticeship. That is the book's first strength. It does not sensationalise marriage, but neither does it flatter it.



WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU ABOUT MARRIAGE
Yashodhara Lal
Penguin, pp 272,
Rs 399

What gives the book its reach is the breadth of the marriage it is willing to examine. Lal follows the relationship not as a single emotional event but as a full domestic arc: the shock of realising one has not, after all, married a fantasy; the weary repetition of quarrels, disappointment and apology; the slow education of desire, difference and emotional gamesmanship; and then the heavier weather of shared life — sex, in-laws, parenting, money, betrayal, repair, and, when repair fails, endings. In that sense, the book mirrors marriage as many people actually live it: not as a straight road from romance to stability, but as a long negotiation between intimacy, individuality, duty and change.

Lal writes as a couples therapist, but the tone is not clinical in the alienating sense. It is conversational, warm, occasionally wry, and alert to the absurdities of long companionship. She seems to understand a truth many advice books miss: people do not need jargon when they are hurt; they need language that helps them recognise themselves without feeling judged.

Its second strength is cultural. Much relationship literature available to Indian readers is either imported whole from the West, with assumptions that do not always fit our familial realities, or drenched in piety about adjustment and endurance. Lal works in a more useful middle zone. She recognises the Indian marriage not simply as a relationship between two individuals, but as a crowded emotional institution involving parental presence, inherited scripts, gendered expectations and the moral theatre of "making it work".

The preface makes clear that Lal's ambition is not to rescue marriage's reputation but to rescue readers from the myths surrounding it. She writes against easy advice, social posturing and the sentimental fiction that love should simply know what to do.

Instead, she normalises difficulty, insisting that confusion and conflict are not private embarrassments but recurring features of long relationships. The objective is both reassuring and bracing: to make marriage less mysterious, but also less lazy; less idealised, but more consciously worked at.

There is also a welcome refusal here to divide couples into saints and villains. Lal is more interested in patterns than in prosecution. She asks what we bring into marriage unknowingly: family histories, emotional reflexes, private scripts about love, power, need and abandonment. What begins as attraction can, over time, curdle into irritation; what once felt reassuring can come to feel limiting.

Lal is an author, coach and therapist in private practice, with corporate experience, international training in coaching and transactional analysis, and advanced work in couples therapy. This is her tenth book. That experience shows not as authority brandished, but as confidence in handling messy material without melodrama.

Books of this kind inevitably suggest a degree of order that real relationships often resist, for life is seldom as structured as insight. Yet Lal is too self-aware a writer to offer easy consolation or fairy-tale fixes. Her real achievement lies in making marriage discussable.

In a culture that celebrates weddings far more easily than marriages, this is a book well worth reading; in its varied emotional and domestic settings, many readers may recognise something of their own lives and their own relationships.

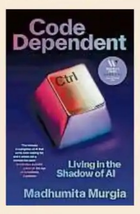
MOODBOARD

A slew of recent books have been examining the darker side of AI and exploring what it really means to 'sleep with AI', as it were. Here are three fascinating ones:

We Are Not Machines by Sarah O'Connor:
A tsunami of change, we are told, is sweeping the economy, as robots and AI threaten to take over tasks done by humans. But

while we worry that we're robotising our work, what if the bigger risk is that we're robotising ourselves? When prize-winning *Financial Times* journalist Sarah O'Connor set out to investigate what was happening on the ground, she met people who weren't necessarily losing their jobs to machines, but who felt they were losing something, nonetheless.

Code-Dependent by Madhumita Murgia:
Through the voices of ordinary people in places far removed from



the cosy enclave of Silicon Valley, this book explores the impact of a set of powerful, flawed, and often exploitative technologies on individuals, communities, and our wider society. Murgia also exposes how AI can strip away our collective and individual sense of agency.

The Infinity Machine by Sebastian Mallaby:
For the past three years, Sebastian Mallaby has had unprecedented access to Hassabis and DeepMind. As Mallaby chronicles, DeepMind is locked in an arms race with Silicon Valley

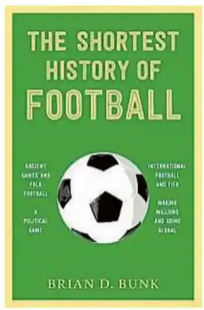
competitors to build artificial general intelligence, and thereby become the keeper of humanity's future. Hassabis has remained in Britain, and unlike his rivals, his aims are not wealth and power but scientific enlightenment. Like them, however, he is haunted by the memory of Robert Oppenheimer, the creator of the atom bomb. He aims to control the technology, but the technology may ultimately control him.

Scoring goals in a global power play

From emperors to autocrats, football's remarkable journey reveals how the world's favourite sport has become a powerful arena for money, influence and identity, writes Sudhirendar Sharma

Football fans wearing masks of Argentine star Lionel Messi take part in his birthday celebrations amid the ongoing FIFA World Cup 2026, in Kolkata. PTI

Kicking a ball as a game was not limited to any particular time or place in human history. Called cuju, it was played in ancient China as early as the third century BCE. How did such a simple kicking game conquer the world? Its antiquity suggests that there is something profoundly human about kicking a ball around. That it would one day become the planet's most popular sport could scarcely have been imagined. More than just a ball game, football has evolved into a cultural and economic juggernaut of unimaginable proportions. The World Cup is not only the most-watched sporting event in the world, but one that has also swayed elections and toppled governments. The tournament has repeatedly been used to promote political agendas and ideological causes.



THE SHORTEST HISTORY OF FOOTBALL
Brian D Bunk
Penguin, pp 288,
Rs 599

The ninety-year history of the coveted trophy is replete with instances of the sport being politically appropriated. Italy, under Benito Mussolini, hosted the 1934 World Cup to showcase its fascist regime and promote its ideology. The authoritarian monarchy of Qatar used the 2022 World Cup to sportswash criticism of its labour practices and human rights record. Saudi Arabia, which will host the 2034 edition, similarly believes that associating itself with football will encourage the world to view the kingdom more favourably.

Football is far more than a kicking game. There was little commercialisation in its early years, but it has now become a money-guzzling enterprise. Profit was once secondary; today, it is the driving force. FIFA, football's self-regulating governing body, has cash reserves larger than the economies of some independent nations, including Kenya and Cuba. As the game's global following has grown exponentially, so too have efforts to maximise revenues and profits. It is, in many ways, "a pleasure that hurts"—a poetic expression that captures both the emotional highs and lows experienced by fans and the discomfort of watching autocrats and powerful institutions profit from the sport.

Sports historian Brian D Bunk, who teaches at the University of Massachusetts, traces football's meteoric rise in The Shortest History of Football. Drawing on both historical and contemporary events, from famous victories to the backroom deals that now shape the sport, Bunk shows how football continues to influence global politics and economics. Although many see football as an escape from everyday life, the sport has never been divorced from violence, power or politics. Yet it remains equally defined by moments of extraordinary triumph and heartbreaking tragedy.

The book offers a concise yet comprehensive account of football's evolution, revealing how the sport has been played, understood and manipulated across generations.

Football inspires immense passion, and events on the pitch have often transformed into tragedy. Sometimes these are the result of deliberate violence; at other times, sheer accident. Together, they form the darker side of the beautiful game.

Fans have forged powerful emotional bonds with players and evolved remarkable ways of expressing their allegiance. Bunk profiles some of football's greatest icons, from Brazilian star Arthur Friedenreich in the early twentieth century to Argentina's Lionel Messi in the twenty-first. Yet he also raises an enduring question: can even the greatest player win a game on his own?

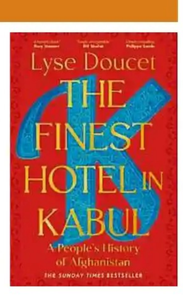
From school grounds to elite club competitions, football has travelled a remarkable distance. Players and clubs may strive for greater autonomy, but governments continue to use football to bolster regimes, shape national narratives and advance political agendas. FIFA, too, pursues its own institutional interests by expanding its revenues and global influence.

The 2026 World Cup appears caught between the self-aggrandising ambitions of FIFA's president and those of the host country's president. While FIFA seeks to maximise revenue as its chief prepares for a re-election bid next year, the host nation is equally eager to advance its own political interests.

READ OF THE WEEK

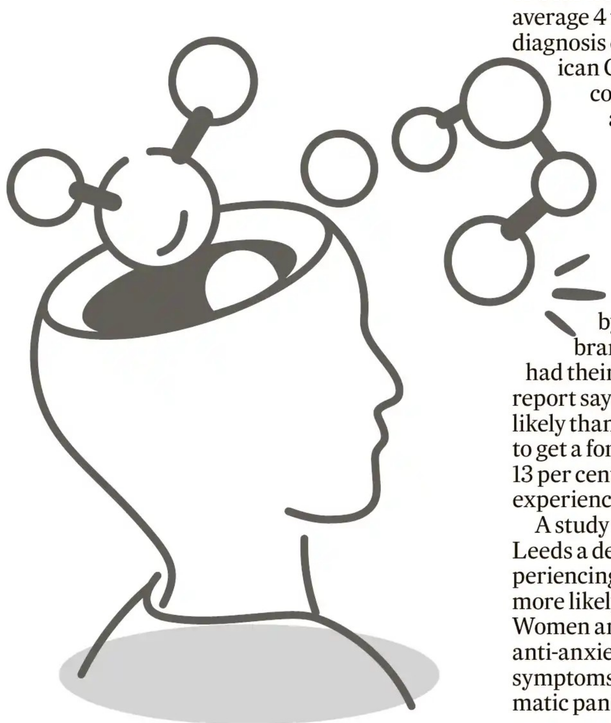
When the Inter-Continental Hotel opened in Kabul in 1969, it reflected the hopes of the country: a glistening white edifice that embodied Afghanistan's dreams of becoming an affluent, modern power. Five decades later, the Inter-Continental is a dilapidated, shrapnel-damaged shell. It has endured civil wars, terrorist attacks, the US occupation, and the rise, fall and rise of the Taliban. But its decaying grandeur still hints at ordinary Afghans' hopes of stability and prosperity.

Lyse Doucet, the *BBC*'s Chief International Correspondent, has been staying at the Inter-Continental since 1988. She has spent decades meeting its staff and guests and listening to their stories. And now, she uses their experiences to offer an evocative history of modern Afghanistan. It is the story of Hazrat, the octogenarian receptionist who for five decades has been witnessing diplomats and journalists, mujahideen and US soldiers, passing through the hotel's doors. It is the story of Abida, the first female chef to work in the Inter-Continental's famous kitchen after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The result is a remarkably vivid account of how ordinary Afghans have experienced half a century of disorder. It captures the soul of Afghanistan from within the walls of the Kabul Inter-Continental.



Unpacking GENDER pain gap

Women experiencing pain often feel invalidated and unseen. Healthcare professionals too tend to dismiss symptoms, misdiagnosing them as psychosomatic. Reasons for gaslighting women can range from institutional bias to studies based on male standards, and deep-rooted cultural attitudes, writes Smitha Murthy



"I met a gynecologist last year who refused to touch me or prescribe painkillers for my severe cramps. She yelled at me for subjecting my body to Western medicine. She told me PCOS (now called PMOS) and IUDs are rubbish and that I deserve the pain."

That's Dr Teena Augustine's horrific experience. A therapist, Dr Teena, says she reported the doctor immediately, and was lucky to find another doctor the next day. But she often finds many of her own women clients coming to her with similar stories, being blamed rather than heard by doctors. You may have heard of the gender pay gap, but the gender pain gap is just as real, with women's physical and mental issues frequently undermined or unrecognised. Women have to cut through layers of institutional bias, data gaps, and cultural dismissals before receiving help for their distress. Gaslighting is a numbing reality for women seeking clinical diagnoses or help. When I first asked women in a WhatsApp group about their experiences with a doctor, everyone, without fail, reported at least one incident where a doctor, irrespective of their gender, dismissed or invalidated their concerns.

Sanjana S ruefully says she has been called a hypochondriac by doctors unwilling to believe her pain, even though she is a psychologist. She repeatedly visited ENT doctors who trivialised her symptoms for ten years until she finally had to undergo emergency treatment. Therapist Sindhiya V, shares a similar experience. "I was yelled at by an attending nurse who said that my screaming was uncalled for during the induced labour of my second child, as she felt I did not have pain tolerance!"

Frequently misdiagnosed

Many women I spoke with reported being gaslit for period pain, often told to manage it or bear it as part of life. Globally, it takes on average 4 to 11 years for a woman to receive a diagnosis of endometriosis, notes the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists. Symptoms are dismissed as 'normal,' or misdiagnosed as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), and even Urinary Tract Infections or UTIs. It gets worse. About 55 per cent of women surveyed in a 2024 'Gender Pain Gap Index Report' brought out by an over-the-counter medication brand in the UK felt that they had had their pain ignored or dismissed. The report says women are significantly more likely than men to wait a year or longer just to get a formal diagnosis for their pain (21 vs. 13 per cent). These facts attest to Sanjana's experience.

A study conducted by the University of Leeds a decade ago found that women experiencing a cardiac event are 50 per cent more likely to be misdiagnosed than men. Women are also sometimes sent home with anti-anxiety prescriptions, with physical symptoms that are diagnosed as psychosomatic panic.

Gaslighting is an everyday reality for women seeking diagnoses or medical help.

Cultural reasons

Why is this so? Some of the reasons are deeply cultural. Women have been historically viewed as being 'too emotional' when describing physical symptoms. Society expects women to suffer more from menstruation and childbirth. Distress, in many cases, is assumed to be psychological because of the 'emotional nature' of women. After all, hysteria originated from the Greek word for hystera, or the womb. Women are often framed as being too delicate or sensitive, while men are perceived as stoic or logical.

Families also frequently undermine women's pain, especially in India, where pain is something one must endure. Girls are conditioned to suppress, not express, and women are taught early on to be the nurturer, who will put their pain on the back burner to take care of the family.

Misdiagnosis is a real danger. If you are a woman and present with acute fatigue, muscle pain, and abdominal discomfort, you are far more likely to be urged to take a consultation with a psychiatrist for 'anxiety' or 'depression' rather than rule out any underlying pathology. Women in their 40s or early 50s are routinely told that most of their problems are either perimenopause or menopause, a medical phenomenon called diagnostic overshadowing, where everything is attributed to one prominent label, causing doctors to often miss many critical signs. For example, brain fog and memory lapses are attributed to estrogen decline in menopause. But it could also be early-onset Alzheimer's or nutritional deficiencies. Joint pain and stiffness are "just age." But it could be rheumatoid arthritis. Palpitations and shortness of breath? "Oh! Just hot flushes. Buy an AC." But it could also be cardiovascular disease, which is the number one killer of women.

Research based on male experiences

Doctors aren't being lazy. They are trained on research drawn from male standards. Doctors often look for textbook signs. But these textbooks have been written by men, based on men, and for men. Even in basic lab research, almost 80 per cent of animal studies have been conducted on male mice. For decades, women of childbearing age were barred from clinical trials based on a US FDA ruling, the impact of which continues to this day. Consider this. Doctors are trained to look for the classical representation of a heart attack as 'localised, crushing chest pain'. Men overwhelmingly present with these symptoms, but women tend to have more diffuse symptoms, such as gastrointestinal distress or pain between the shoulder blades. The result? They are more likely to be misdiagnosed and sent home with an anxiety pill.

Research exclusion has other effects, too. Approved drugs are based on male bodies, with the assumption that women will react to them the same way as men. But women aren't just 'smaller men' as medicine used to assume. With distinct hormonal cycles, immune responses, and metabolic rates, they react differently to medications.

A study found that out of 10 drugs that were withdrawn from the market between 1997 and 2001, eight had higher risks for women.

All of these point to a rather depressing picture. If this article were to be diagnosed, it would probably be dismissed as hysterical. It's written by a woman, after all. But something has to change, and it starts with medical science promoting gender-sensitive approaches to pain, more research that focuses on women, a dismantling of taboos around reproduction, and a society that doesn't believe that pain is just par for the course for being born a woman.

The GAP is REAL

- **According to a study conducted by researchers from McGill University in Canada** (May, 2026 - The New Scientist), women may have "more robust verbal memories than men, which can mask signs of Alzheimer's disease" and delay diagnosis. This indicates that memory tests designed to detect Alzheimer's may fail to pick up the condition in women.
- **Another study published in Lancet Psychiatry (April 2026)** says that globally, women are nearly 1.5 to 2 times more likely than men to experience depression and anxiety. One in four women will face a mental disorder in their lifetime, it notes.

Travel

Abu Dhabi, on a culture beat

The capital city of the UAE has more to it than high-adrenaline adventures and glossy beachfronts. Barkha Kumari turns the lens on its history and transformation

Qasr Al Hosn, the site from where the global metropolis grew.

The skyline around Qasr Al Hosn tells a story before you even step inside. The fort's pale stone walls and jagged battlements stand against a backdrop of gleaming glass-and-steel towers. That's Abu Dhabi in a snapshot, a place where legacy and ambition meet at every turn.

Qasr Al Hosn is the symbolic birthplace of Abu Dhabi. In the late 18th century, the Bani Yas tribe built a watchtower here to guard the island's only freshwater source. According to legend, a gazelle led hunters to the spring that sustained pearling and helped a settlement grow. A museum on the site tells the rest of the story — the watchtower expanded into a fort, and the discovery of oil rewrote Abu Dhabi's future.

The museum feels intimate. Moving through heavy wooden doors, grainy walls and cool corridors, you catch glimpses of Emirati life in Dallah coffee pots, metal trunks, floral bas-reliefs, and date palm mats. The House of Artisans, within the wider complex, deepens that understanding of life in an arid region. Skills once developed for survival are now prized as heritage crafts, including Sadu, Talli, and Khoos.

Emirati hospitality

Ramzan was underway. My evenings were spent at open-air gatherings known as Layali Ramadan, with Majlis By The Sea the most elaborate. I feasted my way through iftars and suhoors, starting with dates and moving on to jallab (a stunning cooler), mutabal, katayef, mafruka, fatteh, stuffed vine leaves, alongside plenty I never got around to trying. Abu Dhabi is home to more than 200 nationalities, and my dining companions boasted a good mix. Endless refills of gahwa and karak chai kept our conversations flowing, while the warm strains of the oud, the starlit sky, and the gentle sea breeze set the tone. Before we knew it, we had become part of a shared Emirati moment.

My days were different. I was exploring Abu Dhabi beyond its high-adrenaline attractions and glossy beachfronts, noticing scale, symmetry, and symbolism everywhere. Between blue skies and reflecting pools, the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque shines in white. It is grand in every sense, with over 80 domes and 1,000 columns, 24-carat gold-gilded chandeliers, and the world's largest hand-knotted carpet. Floral ornamentation of lilies, tulips, irises, and roses turn the marble into a living tapestry. Likewise, Qasr Al Watan, the Presidential Palace, is a visual feast in granite and limestone. Inside the Great Hall, everything competes for attention, from a dome spanning 37 metres in diameter to mirrored cubes in every corner, and a palette of blue, white, and gold that reflects the Arabian Gulf, purity, and desert sands.

Louvre Abu Dhabi showcases human creativity in both its art collection and architecture.

Chasing the new

Some moments showed Abu Dhabi in a new light. At Jubail Island, I saw its green heart: a mangrove ecosystem that guards the fragile coastline. I kayaked through a maze of aerial roots and half-submerged trees, reaching a lagoon so pristine it felt like a hidden world.

Then there's the vision of building a dense cluster of world-class cultural institutions in the Saadiyat Cultural District.

My first stop was TeamLab Phenomena, an immersive digital space that's all over Instagram. Here, winds and waves change course with your presence, and bioluminescence washes over you. 'Biocosmos' makes you feel like a bird drifting through space, dark and limitless. It's nauseating, but oddly wondrous.

Nearby, the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi compresses 13.8 billion years of Earth and cosmic history. It reveals how, 7 million years ago, the Emirate region was a lush savannah teeming with wildlife. I even came face to face with Lucy from Ethiopia, one of the most complete early human ancestors ever discovered, dating back 3.2 million years. Art comes into focus at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, but its architecture pulls you in first. It looks like a flying saucer hovering over the water, topped with a 7,500-tonne dome of interlaced stars that filters light like a palm canopy. Inside, I flitted from a Picasso exhibition on the human form to rare collections such as 'The Triumph of David', a painted and gilded leather wall panel from around 1650, now restored.

TeamLab Phenomena is a wonderland where art, nature, and technology converge.

Al Ain Oasis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its ancient falaj irrigation system, is a 90-minute drive from Abu Dhabi city.

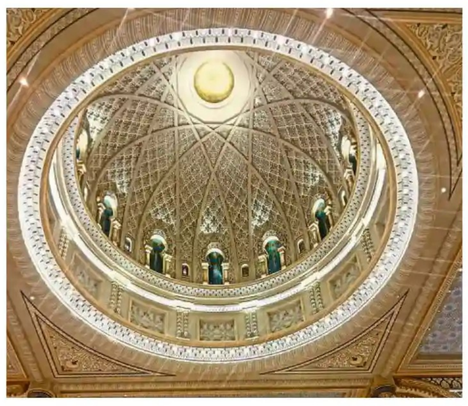
Taming the desert

You can do malls, museums, and Michelin-star dining, but Abu Dhabi only feels complete in the desert. At Nujum Desert Camp near Al Hiyar, I got down to business quickly, sand-bashing down near-vertical dunes in a 4x4, racing ATVs into the sunset, and sandboarding down golden slopes. But as darkness and silence fell over the horizon, the desert started to feel intimidating. How did nomadic Bedouins survive? The 'Ezba Experience' offers a staged glimpse of their culture. Over endless food, we watched a performer toss a disc into the air and somehow turn it into four, and a belly dancer move like wind over dunes.

Desert done, where's the oasis? A 90-minute drive from Abu Dhabi city brought us to Al Ain, the UAE's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. Around 3,000 years ago, its inhabitants learned to cultivate the desert using the falaj, an underground irrigation system that channels mountain water by gravity alone and still feeds the oasis today. You can see the remains of these ancient waterways beneath glass panels at the Al Ain Museum, or hear active channels gurgling beneath more than 1,00,000 date palms in Al Ain Oasis. We last stepped into Bait Mohammed bin Khalifa, a courtyard house washed in soft greens and pinks. Far from an ordinary residence, it captures a turning point in Abu Dhabi's story.

As the oil economy grew, aspirations and architecture evolved too, with traditional mudbrick used alongside imported materials like cement, steel, and aluminium. Even as Abu Dhabi reaches for the next big and bold, it has restored this historic landmark.

(The author was in Abu Dhabi on invitation of Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi.)



Top: Qasr Al Watan features one of the world's largest domes. Above: Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque.

MISFITS to masterpieces

Yams, pumpkins, and bitter gourds are often dubbed boring vegetables but with some ingenuity, chefs are transforming them into exciting preparations like yamamole and kathal nihari, writes Madhulika Dash

Ridge gourd (torai) makhmali tikki.

"I misjudged," admits Chef Vikas Seth (Sanchez) as he recalls a 2015 Ayurveda-led culinary retreat in Palakkad. He was tasked with recreating his famous guacamole that doesn't use avocado but instead uses hand-picked yams from the farm. While not a personal favourite from the basket of summer 'misfits', the root vegetable fit the bill. The real surprise came behind the burner.

"I hadn't anticipated how fast it cooked, or how beautifully it yielded to minimalism and technique," Chef Seth recalls. "A bit of charring, a smidgen of seasoning, a dash of lime, and voila, the first yamamole was born — a dish that travelled from the coconut groves of Kerala straight to his specials, and remained. Since then, his kitchens have regularly championed neglected produce, transforming beetroot leaves with garlic and sesame, and turning pumpkin leaves into a crunchy multi-layered chaat.

Chef Seth isn't alone in this revisionist summer revolution. Chef Johnson Ebenezer (Farmlore) traces his respect for these ingredients to his days at the Taj Coromandel, when hyper-local, seasonal produce arrived at the hotel kitchen for free, meant for the Sunday buffet.

THE FOOD STORY

"Thanks to those complimentary vegetables, I realised soon that a barbecued ivy gourd (tindora) glazed with house-made sauce tastes just as good as a grilled zucchini," says Chef Ebenezer.

"When we started Farmlore, it was a conscious decision to forgo exotic imports entirely for these misunderstood gems." Today, at their peak of culinary brilliance, Farmlore continues to wow diners by woking new plates with the vegetables once hated.

Chef Avinandan Kundu (Sienna Store & Cafe) went a step further, turning childhood aversion into the very foundation of his hyper-seasonal, local restaurant. Bitters are the undisputed kings here.

"In our culture, the role of bitter foods like shukto (stew) and neem begun (stir fry) extends far beyond balancing taste — they possess curative virtues," says Chef Kundu. "The fact that they cleanse the palate, ensuring that subsequent dishes taste better, is a bonus," he adds.

The realisation that culinary technique can transform raw notes into precious tannins inspired Chef Shantanu Mehrotra (Indian Accent) to introduce two distinct iterations of bitter gourd: churan ka karela and meat ka karela. "While both are inspired by the home techniques that our mothers used to tame the bitterness, our effort is to keep that structural element intact so diners can enjoy the gourd's true character," Chef Shantanu explains.

Chingri potol er dolma, which uses pointed gourd and prawns.

Back on fine dine menus

This deep appreciation for structural brilliance has sparked a widespread return of summer misfits to fine dine menus. Whether it is Chef Ishijyot Singh Surri's (Mulk) charred ridge gourd (torai) paired with smoked hung curd, peanut-chilli crunch, and burnt garlic oil, Chef Dhruv Oberoi's (Hood, Bengaluru dining) ashgourd ajoblanco — a rich, garlicky almond and ash gourd soup finished with sweet-and-sour sherry vinegar and kataifi-wrapped smoked duck or Chef Manjit Singh's (Holiday Inn Resort, Goa) basket of multi-textured breadfruit (neerphonos) fritters.

In fact, chefs using summer misfits isn't just about showcasing their culinary prowess but a tribute to the inherent understanding of taste. A fitting example is Chef Manish Mehrotra's (Nisaba) homage to rustic comfort with his kathal (jackfruit) phulka taco and kathal nihari, celebrating the fruit's meat-like texture and ability to absorb deep spices.

Ash gourd ajoblanco.

Even classic continental forms are shifting; for Chef Simran Singh Thapar (The Leela Palace, Bengaluru), crunchy summer ratatouille is a dish built entirely as an ode to native texture and flavour. While traditional thali spaces have always quietly safeguarded these ingredients, their widespread penetration into modern commercial dining scene is a recent phenomenon.

"It goes beyond novelty or a popular trend," explains Chef Suvaranjan Banerjee (Grand Mercure Bengaluru). "It bridges wellness consciousness, and a shifting consumer palate that is open to re-evaluating foods with history," he adds.

Chef Thapar attributes this to a reawakening of the palate, driven by a fascinating intersection of evolutionary biology, neurology, and psychology. As we age, our palate naturally dulls to the sharp bitter sensations and challenging textures that made us reject these vegetables as children, explain Chef Thapar and Chef Mehrotra. The gut-mind connection ensures that the brain decides what you like and dislike, which in turn affects digestion. Combine that with a wave of nostalgia for disappearing foods from our childhood, and suddenly we are remarkably receptive, they elaborate.

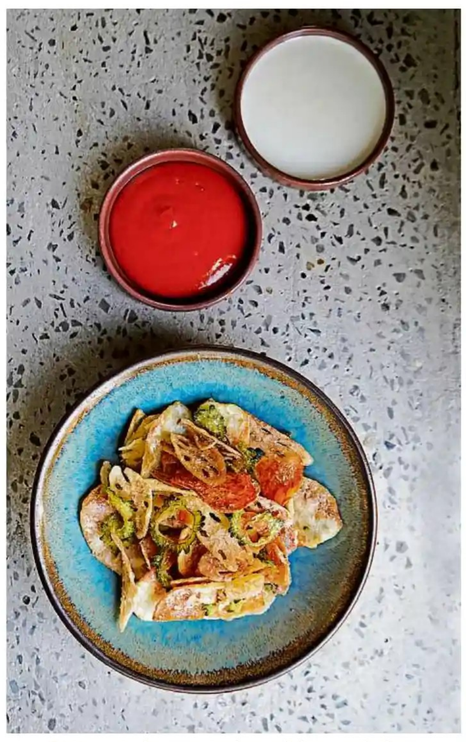
Also, utilising these ingredients at their seasonal peak makes financial and environmental sense. "When produce comes to you in its prime, it requires minimal intervention, stays cost-effective, and delivers peak nutrition," adds Chef Banerjee, who often finds new ways to introduce the produce into the staff meal before bringing it into a brunch menu, pop-up, or as a limited edition.

Forgotten gems

Chef Avani Sharma's Karada cuisine pop-up at Watson's Cantina features forgotten regional gems like bondya pathrade sukken (stuffed banana flowers) and gharan papadan chutney, which reimagines jackfruit through pickles and papad.

For Chef Amit Dash (The Westin Gurugram) the "spotlight" on regional foods is both seasonally and culturally attuned to our bodies. "They are readily available in local markets, carry an incredibly low carbon footprint, and are naturally prepped with nutrition that processed food and exotic produce can't match, making them functional and primed for clean eating," says Chef Dash.

Ultimately, though, says Chef Singh, this movement's impetus lies in its cultural relevance. In times when, he says, "wellness has become the core centre of luxury, using traditional Indian food and indigenous ingredients has become the most sustainable approach to take." And as these dishes vanish from domestic kitchens, chefs are stepping in to preserve the edible legacies that built us and will continue to do so. "What keeps this momentum alive is also the unquenchable creative fascination of working with a completely new canvas," concludes Chef Surri. "The key here is minimalism and precise technique — not substitution," he says.



Salt and vinegar bajaar chips and dips.

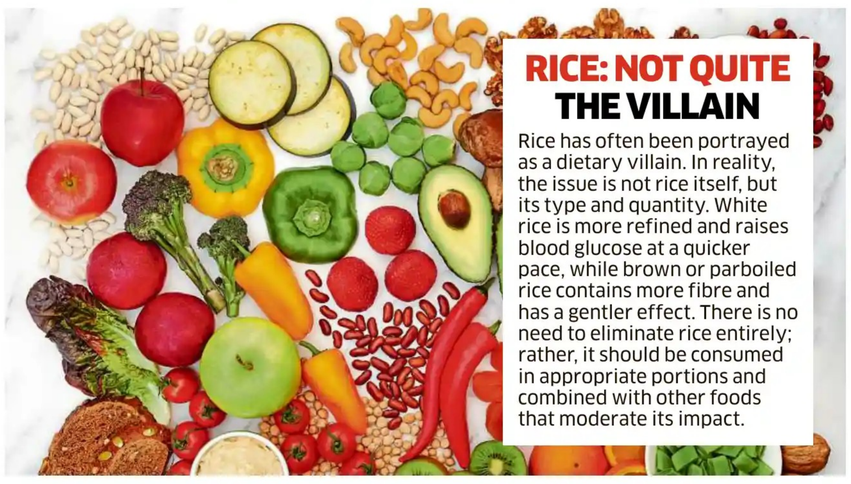
Mochar ghonto, which uses banana flowers.

It is a philosophy beautifully embodied by Chef Yogender Pal (Grand Hyatt Goa), whose deep-dive exploration of the humble pumpkin led to a recurring menu celebrating its rich, nutty sweetness, successfully turning an old household misfit into a guest favourite. Of course, there is always the satisfaction, say the chefs in unison, "of bringing goodness to the plate."

(The author is a seasoned food columnist and curator of experiential dining experiences, pop-ups and retreats for chefs.)

Diet & diabetes: Cutting through the clutter

Do diets work in the long term? Can diabetes be 'reversed'? Dr Anoop Misra answers frequently asked diet questions and highlights the importance of balanced meals for best outcomes



RICE: NOT QUITE THE VILLAIN

Rice has often been portrayed as a dietary villain. In reality, the issue is not rice itself, but its type and quantity. White rice is more refined and raises blood glucose at a quicker pace, while brown or parboiled rice contains more fibre and has a gentler effect. There is no need to eliminate rice entirely; rather, it should be consumed in appropriate portions and combined with other foods that moderate its impact.

These days, strong opinions about food are everywhere. One day, rice is labelled dangerous and the next day, mangoes are declared forbidden. Patients often walk into the clinic understandably confused, asking whether they should follow keto, whether diabetes can truly be reversed, or if they must just give up everything they enjoy eating.

The problem, simply, is that there is far too much advice, and far too little understanding that is grounded in scientific evidence. It helps to step back and examine what the evidence tells us.

What's the right word?

This is perhaps the most common question I encounter in clinical practice. For years, type 2 diabetes was considered a lifelong condition. That perception is now evolving, but it is important to use the correct terminology. What is often referred to as reversal is, more accurately, remission.

We now know that in some individuals — particularly those who are recently diagnosed and overweight — substantial weight loss can bring blood glucose levels back to near-normal ranges, sometimes without the need for medication. Typically, this requires a weight reduction of around 10 to 15 kilograms.

The underlying mechanism is relatively straightforward — excess fat in the liver and pancreas interferes with insulin function, and when this fat is reduced, insulin sensitivity improves.

However, this is only part of the story. This approach does not work for everyone. It is not easy to achieve or sustain it, and importantly, diabetes often returns if weight is regained. Remission is possible in a subset of patients — but it is neither effortless nor guaranteed to be permanent.

Do diets work in the long term?

Most diets do work — at least in the short term. Whether it involves calorie restriction, structured meal plans, or meal replacements, weight loss can usually be achieved initially. The real challenge, however, lies in maintaining that loss over the long term.

Simple eating habits work

In everyday clinical practice, it becomes evident that a specific type of diet is less important than consistent adherence to it. What tends to work best are simple, sustainable patterns of eating — balanced meals, reasonable portion sizes, and regular physical activity. In contrast, more extreme approaches often appear promising in the beginning but become difficult to sustain over time.

Individuals who adopt a moderate and sensible approach to eating tend to achieve far better long-term outcomes than those who repeatedly try restrictive or aggressive dietary plans.

Keto and intermittent fasting

Keto diets and intermittent fasting have gained popularity in recent years. Keto diets, which are very low in carbohydrates, can lead to rapid weight loss and noticeable improvements in blood glucose levels in the short term. However, over time, this advantage tends to diminish when compared to more conventional approaches.

There are also concerns that cholesterol levels may rise, and the long-term safety of such diets is not yet fully established. Perhaps most importantly, many individuals find these diets difficult to maintain over a longer timeframe.

Intermittent fasting, whether in the form of time-restricted eating or alternate-day fasting, can also result in modest weight loss and improvements in certain metabolic markers.

However, when examined closely, the outcomes are broadly similar to those achieved through standard calorie restriction. The long-term effects remain uncertain, and in people with diabetes, such approaches may require medical supervision.

The key point to understand is that these strategies are tools, not cures. They are effective primarily because they reduce overall calorie intake, and not because they offer any fundamentally superior metabolic advantage.

Much of the confusion arises from the tendency to label foods as simply good or bad which is rarely accurate.

So, what really works?

A balanced diet based on whole foods, mindful portion control, and regular physical activity continue to form the cornerstone of good health.

There is no single food that will determine your health, and there is no shortcut diet that guarantees sustained success.

(Dr Anoop Misra is the author of Smart Calories and Common Sense published by Bloomsbury. He has been on several national advisory panels on diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and nutrition.)

MYTHBUSTER

Mangoes have a moderate glycemic load.

Mango scare

Mangoes are a source of frequent concern. Patients often hesitate even to mention them. The reality is that mangoes are not harmful when consumed in moderation.

They have a moderate glycemic load and provide valuable nutrients. A single portion within a balanced meal and substituting carbs (eg: 250 gm of mango instead of two bread slices) is generally acceptable, even for many individuals with diabetes.

The oil dilemma

Saturated fats such as ghee, butter and coconut oil are often over-promoted, but excessive intake can increase cholesterol levels, liver fat and heart attack risk. Healthier options include mustard oil, olive oil and canola oil. The most important principle is moderation — even healthier oils should be used sparingly.

Nuts: good or bad?

Nuts largely justify their positive reputation. Almonds, walnuts, and pistachios can enhance satiety, help control post-meal blood glucose levels (when taken before meals) and support cardiovascular health. However, portion size remains critical; a small handful is beneficial, whereas an excessive intake of nuts adds unnecessary calories.

DR ANOOP MISRA

(Mythbuster is a column that picks up popular wellness beliefs and examines if they are true, false, or maybe lies somewhere in between.)

BIOHACK OF THE WEEK

Mind your portions

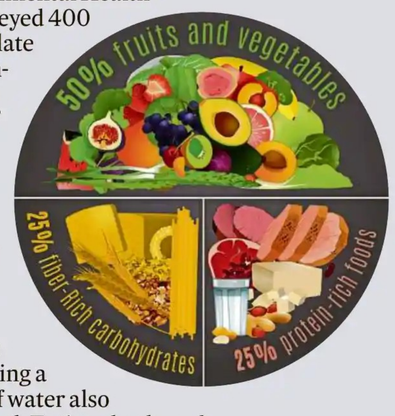
One of the most common-sensical ways to ensure a healthy weight and diet is to practice portion control. It's a method that helps you eat a meal that has the right balance of proteins, carbohydrates, and nutrients. But what are the ways in which you can maintain portion control?

Take a dinner plate and first ensure that it has one quarter of protein. It could be chicken, tofu, fish, egg, or soya that fills up a quarter of the plate.

Next, fill up two quarters of your plate with fibre; vegetables, and a small amount of fruit. Ensure that the vegetables are non starchy. You can also make a wholesome salad to fill up this space. This leaves you with one quarter. Fill up this quarter with whole grains, be it rice, millets, or roti. Another way to ensure portion control is to add one handful of protein, two handfuls of vegetables and fibre, one handful of carbohydrates, and a thumb size of fats by way of nuts, oil or butter.

Smaller plates

There's one more way to think of portion control — using smaller plates. A March 2026 piece published in Clinical and Experimental Health Sciences, that surveyed 400 adults, says that "plate size significantly influenced expected satiety perception" for spinach, pilaf, soup, pasta, and bulgur. The study also showed that oval serving plates and shallow soup bowls frequently showed "higher satiety and portion estimations". Starting a meal with a glass of water also helps portion control. Eating slowly and chewing your food well help in controlling portion sizes. Other methods to ensure mindful eating is to opt for half a serving first, especially when you are dining out. Maintaining a food journal will help you stay mindful.



Order matters

The order in which you eat your meals also matters. Start with fibre, follow it up with protein, then healthy fat, and finally carbohydrates. According to findings in a review article published in Clinical Nutrition Research (January, 2026), the order of eating food can "mitigate acute postprandial glucose responses in healthy individuals". The review noted that the effects were clearly seen when vegetables, protein-rich food, or fruits were eaten before carbohydrate-rich foods.

(Curated by Savitha Karthik)

*(**Biohack of the Week** offers actionable tips to optimise your wellbeing.)*

ROOTING FOR NATURE

Milkweed butterflies are known for their spectacular biannual migrations across the Indian peninsula, and Bengaluru gets a ringside view in June, writes Ramya Coushik

Wanderlust on wings

The blue tiger butterfly.

The dark blue tiger butterfly.

Navilu Kaadu is home to a panoply of captivating wild beings, and many of them have featured in this column over the last four years. This article marks the 50th edition of 'Rooting For Nature,' and as a happy coincidence, I get to crow about Navilu Kaadu's crows and tigers in this one!

Before you write me off as a loon, I am neither referring to the clever black bird nor to the splendid striped mammal, but to creatures that match the splendidness and ingenuity of both — butterflies of the Danainae sub-family under the Nymphalidae family of brush-footed butterflies such as the blue tiger (*Tirumala limniace*), dark blue tiger (*Tirumala septentrionis*), striped tiger (*Danaus genutia*), plain tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*), double-branded crow (*Euploea sylvester*), common crow (*Euploea core*) among others, all indulgingly called 'crows and tigers' by lepidopterists, aka butterfly watchers.

Continuing the tale of Navilu Kaadu's milkweed plants from my earlier column, here's the thrilling story of Danaine butterflies that begin life as tiny eggs on the undersides of the leaves of our milkweed plants, gorge on the very leaves as larvae, and as adults, embark on epic, cross-generational, 1,000-odd kilometre mass migrations traversing peninsular India, infusing verve and life into the tapestry of ecosystems along the way.

The lifecycles of these prolific pollinators are so intertwined with several milkweed plant species (Asclepias spp., family Apocynaceae) that they also go by the name milkweed butterflies.

The striped tiger butterfly.

Milkweed plants contain toxic compounds called pyrrolizidine alkaloids (Vinayan et al., April 2023). Danaines have evolved to be immune to the toxins. The larvae stock up on the noxious compounds in their bodies to last through adulthood, and deploy them in many ways, one of them, as a shield against potential predators, signalled through vivid wing colouration, in a defence mechanism called aposematism.

Besides their Mithridatic tendency of toxin sequestering, these extraordinary butterflies are known for their wanderlust. Thanks to the dual monsoon ballet over peninsular India, Danaine butterflies migrate twice a year, between the rainforests of the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats and plains. (*Krushnamegh Kunte, 2005*)

In April and May, as wildflowers spring to life after the pre-monsoon showers over the summer-scorched mountains of the Western Ghats, throngs of newly minted adult tigers and crows fuel up on wild nectar and vital nutrients.

The butterflies then take wing, seeking the drier climate of the ghats and the plains to the east of the peninsula, moving away from the southwest monsoon that drenches the emerald mountains of the Western Ghats between June and September.

When researching Danaine butterflies, I stumbled upon a detailed Danaine butterfly migratory route through Karnataka's airspace, studied extensively by Mysuru naturalists Arun Kumar Raj Urs, Namratha Urs and Swathi H A. They found that the butterflies commence their journey from a place close to Sringeri in the Western Ghats, through Kukke Subramanya, and then Madikeri, where the group splits up. One set moves towards Hassan, passes along Bengaluru's outskirts towards Male Mahadeshwara Betta, and eventually reaches Yercaud in Tamil Nadu.

The second group flies to the Brahmagiri Hills, then to Wayanad, Nagarahole National Park, the Nilgiris, Anamalai Hills, and Coimbatore. Some reach Biligirirangana Betta via Bandipur Tiger Reserve.

Bengaluru gets a ringside view of this spectacular migration in the months preceding a good southwest monsoon, between April and June, situated as it is, along the Danaine migratory route. Aren't we lucky!

Once they reach their eastern destination, the butterflies reproduce and perish. The progeny retrace their elders' wing beats to the Western Ghats between September and November, as the northeast monsoon advances over the eastern flank of peninsular India. Sometimes, it could also be the third generation returning to the Western Ghats.

The way of life of the crows and tigers could be at risk, as the Danaine butterfly migratory routes are being dangerously interrupted by busy expressways that snuff out these low-flying butterflies in large numbers. Pesticide spraying and deforestation, too, are obliterating milkweeds, the Danaine host plants, along their migratory paths.

Planting milkweed species and other butterfly host plants in Bengaluru's public and private gardens can support the enthralling life cycles of Danaine butterflies, which give us the gift of pollination. Here are a few Danaine favourites — Bruno's milk vine (*Marsdenia brunoniana*), green milkweed creeper (*Cosmostigma racemosum*), green wax flower (*Dregea volubilis*), bread flower (*Vallaris heynei*), giant milkweed (*Calotropis gigantea*), and rubber bush (*Calotropis procera*).

The common crow butterfly.

Rooting For Nature *is a monthly column on an off-kilter urban family's trysts with nature on a natural farm. The author runs Green Goobé, a sustainable venture. Reach her at bluejaydiaries@gmail.com or @ramyacoushik on Instagram.*

Showcasing the beautiful game

Soccer & Technology from the FIFA Museum, in its North American debut in Vancouver, has drawn hundreds of fans to Science World to study the game's evolution as organisers aim to accelerate soccer's growth in ice hockey-mad Canada.

Located at the eastern end of False Creek, Science World sits steps from BC Place, the city's World Cup venue, providing a fitting backdrop.

"We found it a great fit for us, especially with the topic of this exhibition being about technology and all the professions that surround the game," Sebastian Munoz, Senior Exhibition Design Manager at Science World, told *Reuters*.

Visitors can explore five themed zones — Broadcasting and Media, Intelligent Data, Refereeing and Fair Play, Staging the Game, and Innovation Lab — each illustrating the role of technology in modern soccer. The exhibition also features artefacts linked to the host nations. "We really tried to localise the content to Vancouver and to the three nations that are hosting the World Cup, because people like to see things that are made and tailored for that experience and for this World Cup," Munoz said.

Munoz believes the exhibition can contribute to the sport's development in Canada. "It will definitely, because it talks about the professions that surround the game. So you don't have to just be a soccer player to be involved in the FIFA World Cup. You can be any of the professions that surround it and that you're applying this technology to the game," he added.

Reuters

SOTERICA

A monthly exploratory infographic for the always curious

How 3D avatars and a 'smart ball' are tracking offsides

A combination of AI player modelling and ball-tracking sensors has given the 2026 FIFA World Cup a sophisticated, semi-automated system for offside calls. All 1,248 tournament players have been digitally scanned to create precise, real-time 3D avatars, and inside the Adidas Trionda match ball, an embedded motion sensor records movement and contact 500 times per second. The moment a pass is struck, the sensor captures the exact timestamp, while synchronised stadium cameras track the precise skeletal positions of the players.

By fusing the ball-contact data with the digital avatars, this new system instantly determines whether an attacker is offside. Simply put, offside occurs when an attacker is ahead of the second-last defender at the moment a teammate passes the ball. While human referees retain final on-field authority, technology now handles the microscopic margins of measurement. ■

The 14 grams nobody can feel

INTEGRATING electronics into a World Cup football is an engineering tightrope. FIFA regulations strictly dictate weight, balance, bounce, and aerodynamics; even a milligram of misalignment can alter a striker's shot or a goalkeeper's save.

To bypass this, Adidas engineered the Trionda's 14-gram sensor as a core element of the ball's internal suspension system, rather than an afterthought glued inside. The entire package, comprising motion sensors, wireless transmitters, and a rechargeable battery, is perfectly centred. Its centre of mass is mathematically identical to a traditional ball, preserving its exact feel during passes, headers, and volleys. Charged wirelessly before kick-off, the ball functions as a live data node without players ever noticing a difference on the pitch. ■

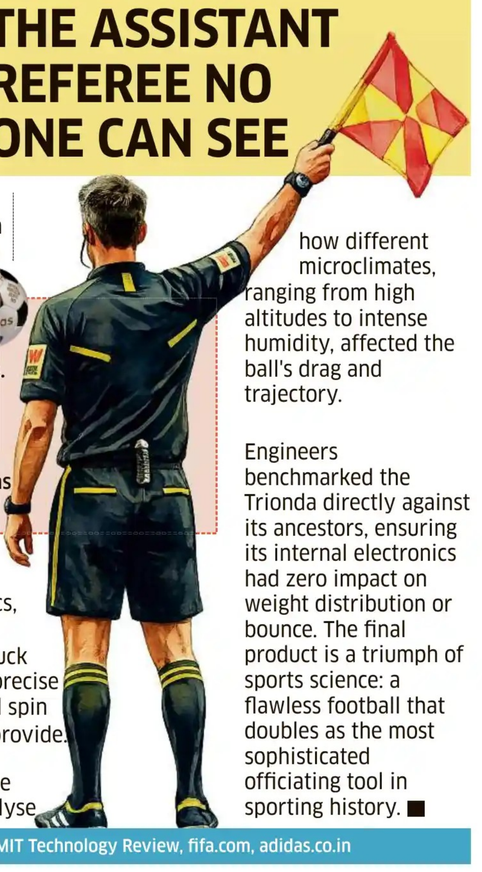
This FIFA World Cup, some of the most critical decisions on the ground are not being made solely by human eyes. Invisible sensors, AI-driven player models, and real-time tracking systems now work alongside referees, turning every movement into data. The game's tightest calls depend on...

THE ASSISTANT REFEREE NO ONE CAN SEE

AT full sprint, a world-class forward can travel up to 9.7 metres per second. During the 200 milliseconds (ms) it takes for a human linesman's brain to process that a pass has been kicked,

Why it matters

that forward has already moved nearly 2 metres. This makes tight offside calls humanly impossible to judge perfectly. So, by feeding data into the stadium's camera tracking system every 2 ms, the Trionda chip completely bridges the "human lag". ■



WORLD CUP BALLS: THE GOOD AND THE BAD

Telstar, 1970: The iconic black and white pentagons were designed to stand out on monochrome TV broadcasts.

Jabulani, 2010: A rather controversial ball. Its radically smooth surface created erratic, swirling flight paths that terrified goalkeepers.

TO ensure the Trionda didn't suffer the Jabulani's fate, it underwent a gruelling 3.5-year testing programme using lab robotics, wind tunnels, and real-world trials. Kicking

The 3.5-year testing marathon

robots repeatedly struck prototypes at hyper-precise angles, velocities, and spin rates to gather data no human player could provide.

The testing then went global. Prototypes were deployed across World Cup host cities to analyse how different microclimates, ranging from high altitudes to intense humidity, affected the ball's drag and trajectory.

Engineers benchmarked the Trionda directly against its ancestors, ensuring its internal electronics had zero impact on weight distribution or bounce. The final product is a triumph of sports science: a flawless football that doubles as the most sophisticated officiating tool in sporting history. ■

TEXT & DESIGN: SIDDHARTH MOHANTY | Sources: MIT Technology Review, fifa.com, adidas.co.in

MOTLEY GARDEN

The trees that ask for nothing

An avenue tree is among a city's oldest residents, and its least protected. Yet it continues to be the green goddess on the street, asking for nothing, writes Subhashini Chandramani

Every morning on my way to work, I drive past a grand old banyan tree. Its trunk is a gathering of numerous columns, old hanging roots that have thickened into wood and clustered together. The younger aerial strands, with their tender yellow tips, shine in the dappled sun. Halfway up the trunk, fresh green leaves sprout straight out of the old wood.

Three hanging signboards in Kannada and English read 'Aalada mara', and 'Banyan tree'. A red board says that Lord Muneeshwara resides in the tree and requests people not to leave photos and idols of gods at the roots. Around the tree and beneath that board lies everything it forbids: discarded frames with broken glass and mini figurines.

A giant banyan tree is an ecosystem by itself.

A bust of Lord Venkateshwara nestles in a hollow between the buttress roots. Reverence and neglect in the same frame. Along the circumference, more signs compete for space: bold red lettering, phone numbers, promises of work and sale. The boards hang unevenly, held in place by nails driven into living bark.

This is not a single instance. Many avenue trees endure their own versions of this treatment. They stand with their roots sealed under concrete, paved right up to the trunk. A root is not just an anchor; it is how the tree lives. Sealed off, it starves slowly.

Some trees work hard to push the heavy slabs up, cracking the neat surface in search of space. Some stand stoically and do not push at all. Some lose their grip on earth and eventually fall when there is a storm. The tree gets the blame for falling, or the storm does, but never the concrete. If the concrete seals the tree, the garbage smothers it. In the urban imagination, the base of a street tree is a kind of no-man's land. It belongs to everyone and therefore to no one. Plastic bags, food waste, and construction rubble, all of it collects there with the same indifference.

It becomes a dumping ground where cattle pick through plastic. The tree stands in the middle, doing what it always does: holding its ground, filtering the air, offering shade to people who walk past.

A wall may carry a poster. A pole may carry a wire. A tree is meant to carry neither, but in a city, it carries both. It does not protest. It does not withdraw. It accommodates, growing around what is done to it. The bigger the tree, the less we see it as somethingthat needs care. It becomes part of the background, and background noise is shut off from our minds.

Every avenue tree began the way any plant does in a garden, watered, watched, and cared for. A sapling outgrows its pot the way a child outgrows its shoes, and the gardener keeps moving it to a larger one until it finds a place to grow into.

An avenue tree asks for the same thing, only at a larger scale; it needs space for its girth to widen and its roots to spread. An avenue tree is also among the city's oldest residents, and its least protected one.

The trees were chosen with care by horticulturists and planted so that something was always in bloom.

When one species was done, the next bloomed, and the city had a symphony of colours overhead throughout the year. The trees were how the city knew itself.

A flower seller was the woman who sat beneath the pongamia; a cobbler was the one under the rain tree. Directions were given with trees as coordinates. "Walk a furlong. You will see a margosa tree. Take the left there," were the instructions.

Trees were the landmarks, a meeting point for youth, a place to rest. It was the opposite of background. It was how you identified your place of living. Tomorrow morning, I will again drive past the Banyan tree, and the gardener in me will do what it always does. I will observe the dusty leaves, the nailed bark, the sealed ground, and wonder how old it is.

The tree will look at me and continue being the green goddess on the street, asking for nothing.

An avenue tree like the one pictured suffers many indignities but continues to stand tall and provide shade. (PIC BY AUTHOR)

Motley Garden *is your monthly kaleidoscopic view into a sustainable garden ecosystem. The author believes gardens are shared spaces where plants and creatures thrive together. She can be reached at allthingsinmygarden@gmail.com or on social media at @allthingsinmygarden*

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